

PEAKS AND PLAINS OF CENTRAL ASIA

R. C. F. SCHOMBERG



A Turki Girl of Kashgar

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OF

CENTRAL ASIA

Travel

by

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To

My Aunt

LAURA

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INTRODUCTION

This book describes two journeys made during the years 1927-29 and 1930-31 in Chinese Central Asia, that vast region which lies to the north of India, beyond the Himalaya and Karakoram Mountains.

The modern province of Sinkiang, or the New Dominion, comprises all the possessions of China in Central Asia. The old province of Ili, the remains of Outer Mongolia, recently Sovietised, Eastern Turkestan or Kashgaria, and Zungaria have all been grouped into this one administrative unit under a central authority at the capital, the city of Urumchi or Tihwa.

This immense territory extends from the Gobi of Mongolia in the east to Asiatic Russia in the west: it marches with Afghanistan, with the Indian Empire for over 400 miles, and with Tibet: and it stretches from Kansu in the south-east to the confines of Siberia in the north-west.

In this region all the rivers except one are lost in the desert or end in a lake, and the sole exception finds its way to the Arctic Ocean. There are lofty mountains, with dense forests and with wonderful pastures; arid deserts; smiling cultivation with orchards of peaches, nectarines and other fruit, and with melons of a flavour like the nectar of the gods. Large lakes abound, and nature is both lavish and miserly.

In the south, in what is known as Eastern Turkestan or Kashgaria, there is a large settled Mohammedan population, known indifferently as Turki, Sart, or Chanto, who are by occupation cultivators or traders. In the mountains there are the nomads, dwelling in their round felt tents, wandering with their flocks during the summer, and resting in a sheltered valley during the winter. These people fall into two groups, the Mohammedans, who are either Kirghiz or Kasak, and the Mongols, who are lamaistic Buddhists by religion, and are known as Kalmucks.

There are other races in small numbers, all immigrants, and amongst these are Chinese, Tartars, Russians, Indians, Manchus and Tungans or Chinese Mohammedans, but the Turki of the plains and the nomads of the uplands are the predominant races. Both are of Mongol stock, but the Kasak and Kirghiz are closely allied to the Turki, while the Kalmuck, by religion, habits and language is far removed.

Sinkiang is still unblessed with the modern inventions which are supposed to classify a country as civilised. There is not a railway or a metalled road in it. There are no banks, cinemas, libraries, factories, hospitals. The schools are few and very primitive, motor-cars are almost unknown, electric light exists at Urumchi, which also possesses a telephone; so far only two radio stations, at Kashgar and Urumchi, disfigure the landscape.

We found on our journeys that the large towns were so situated that it was impossible to avoid them, and although we used to try every means in our power to mask them, we never succeeded.

The Takla Makan desert, in the centre of Kashgaria, was an added complication, as it lay, a forbidden land, between the Tien Shan and the Kuen Lun Mountains. It made us take many long and circuitous detours.

Our mode of travel was on horseback. We rode perched precariously on our bedding, and when the girths were loosened or a horse stumbled, we fell off. The cook was an adept at doing so, and broke many eggs and pairs of goggles, but I often wondered if it was not because he went to sleep in the intervals of chewing snuff.

Donkeys, laden with grain for the horses, used to accompany us, and were a permanent nuisance, as they would always fall down when crossing a stream and drown placidly before our eyes. They never attempted to struggle to their feet, and had to be manhandled over—a cold business as a rule. The rivers were our chief worries, as they were hardly ever bridged and the fords were uncertain.

No doubt at times Chinese Central Asia lacked interest. It was a little monotonous, with a rather unchanging landscape. The people were peaceful, and, in our opinion, had little to complain of, for Chinese rule was easy-going. The modern complications which harass the West are unknown and unwanted in Chinese Central Asia, which resembles the England of Tudor times. The one really modern institution is the Chinese post, rapid, efficient, and most reliable. No praise is too high for this wonderful organisation, which is far ahead of its neighbours' postal services.

There is nothing barbarous or backward about

life without the mechanical toys and trinkets of the West. On the contrary, in Turkestan the standard of living is good, if full bellies, dry houses, and sufficient clothing mean anything. The food is abundant and wholesome, the dwellings are roomy and weather-proof, the fuel is adequate, and generally the Central Asiatic is better off in every way than the Afghan, Tibetan or Indian.

It is such a country and such a people that this book tries to describe; and as bustle and fluster are unknown in the leisurely land of Turkestan, our journey was slow and deliberate. Quick travel is mercifully still unknown there. As the climate was hot in summer and cold in winter, we travelled in the plains in the winter and in the hills in the summer. Distances were great, and conditions of weather, time and routes were often inconvenient, obliging us to retrace our steps and to cover the same tracks twice.

The officials, though increasing, were still happily few, and seldom left their yamens. The troubles of the outside world have not yet reached Sinkiang, and an absence of political problems is a blessing to the people, who have no voice whatever in the worries of their rulers.

In conclusion, I must express my thanks for very many kindnesses received from officials, both British and Chinese, without whose help my journeys would never have been accomplished.

PART I

THE FIRST JOURNEY 1927-1929

CHAPTER I

FROM KASHGAR TO UCH TURFAN

Every traveller in Central Asia knows (and blesses) the British Consulate-General at Kashgar, for it is a haven of comfort and a centre of hospitality to the European who elects to try his luck in Chinese Turkestan ; and so we left its kindly walls and said good-bye to our hosts with sad hearts. Our destination was Urumchi, the capital of the province, and about 800 miles distant by road, along the southern slopes of the Tien Shan or Heavenly Mountains. Time means nothing in Asia, the daily marches are limited by considerations of water and forage, so that travel is a leisurely business. The horses have to be rested, and halts of a few days are frequent, and we knew that it would take us months to reach the distant city. A Chinese friend once rode the whole way in thirty-five days, and this was regarded as a marvellous achievement of speed and pluck.

Along the highway from Kashgar, the capital of the south, to Urumchi, the seat of government of the whole of Sinkiang, as the Chinese possessions in Central Asia are now termed, there are several large towns, which the western traveller always wants to avoid and never manages to. We ourselves sometimes left the main track and struck inland, to visit some place

of interest or to dodge some city, with its visits to officials, its endless invitations and futile conversations. We avoided, too, the monotony of the beaten road.

Thus it was that as we travelled from Kashgar through the low hilly country of the north, we made for Kelpin, an isolated, rarely visited settlement, and from there meant to go on to Uch Turfan, a small town near the hills with a great reputation for cheapness. It was nice enough to be on the road, but we knew that it would be a weary while before we should again come across anything remotely resembling that British outpost.

It was a bright October day in 1927 that we went out under the high walls of the Consulate and took a last look at the only British flag that flies between the Himalayas and the North Pole.

There was not a tremor in the air, so the dust hung over us, marking our passage through the narrow town, as the cloud marked the track of the children of Israel in the wilderness. It is always a great effort for any Oriental to leave a place finally, and the Turki was no exception; and many desertions had to be rectified at the last moment. There was even a donkey short and one had to be bought for twelve shillings; and then there were the tearful but mercenary adieux of the temporary wives of the pony-men.

The caravan-bashi was Ali Khan, more accurately Eli Akhun, who had been with me before. He was a capable, competent, genial scoundrel, with a heart like a lion's, an immense knowledge of what a pack-horse could and could not do, a foul temper, a vile tongue, an immense appetite, and a superb belief in

himself. He had previously been the servant of a caravan-owner merchant, but an advance of money from me had turned him into a capitalist and caravan owner too.

Kashgar was soon left behind. After passing through extensive cemeteries, the feature of the outskirts of all Turki towns, for in this dry climate a building of mud is less perishable than a monument of bronze, even if the latter were not stolen, we entered the district of Besh Karim.

This place is famous throughout Asia as the producer of the finest melons in a land of melons ; and, as we had started late and the day was drawing in, we halted for the first night in this paradise of the epicure. It would be impossible to describe the melons of Besh Karim, suffice it to say that their reputation was justified.

The plains of Turkestan are seldom beautiful, but, as we crawled over them in late autumn, they looked forlorn. The crops had been gathered, except for late patches of rice and millet ; the water had been turned on to the fields to soften the ground for the plough ; and, over all, hung the persistent grey haze of Turkestan that turns the whole landscape into a blur, smudging the near hills and wholly obscuring the distant mountains, and making the general aspect of the country depressing and deadening. There is no use cursing the haze, although we did revile it daily, for it is a feature of the country and has to be reckoned with. Sometimes the haze lifts after a rare shower or an unexpected change of wind ; then a new country is unfolded before the eyes—

a land of mountains and blue hills and ochre bluffs, with green islands in the sage-coloured plains. On such days Kashgar is a lovely sight; the gleaming peaks of the Pamirs, the high poplars, the orchards, the gardens. But for most days in the year, it is a fog-bound, dingy blur in the thick air.

We entered the desert (or dasht) on leaving Besh Karim, and this desert shares with the haze the chief rôle in the make-up of the country. In summer, there is a mirage over most of it; in winter, a cold, gnawing disreputable wind. The Turki hates the desert. It is only one step from the town to the desert—but he cannot bear to take that step; so much so that many Turkis have never left their villages in their lives. Thus it is that the Turki is a man of the town rather than of the country; that he identifies himself by his town and not by his race; that he lacks any interest outside his own district, and, in consequence, is rather a dull companion. But the desert wins the odd trick, however much the Turki may hate and shun it; for, after death, all are buried there, as irrigated land is too valuable to be wasted on the dead!

Our destination was the small and isolated district of Kelpin, and we soon entered the foothills of the so-called Kashgar Mountains. Most mountains in Turkestan have no names at all, as there is no reason to christen them. After all, the mountain is obviously a mountain, and the Turki only knows the one nearest his oasis.

We did not know the way but we were not unchaperoned, as the Chinese always provide some one



A KIRGHIZ WOMAN OF THE CHINESE PAMIRS

from the yamen to guide and control the stranger, and very useful these men are. Not that they have any intelligence to speak of, though it can sometimes be discerned; but they act as the source whence the traveller's needs are supplied, and if they do not know the road (which is not infrequently the case), they induce the local villager to point it out.

Travel in Turkestan is often easy in the plains, as there are decent houses; for the Sart (the usual name given to the town-dweller) loves comfort, and so builds himself a really good house. We used to send one of our men on in advance. He would choose a house, turn out the old women, cats, cradles, fowls and other harmless superfluities, and then prepare three good rooms for us. No one minded; on the contrary, they were generally glad, as they were well paid, doctored free of charge, heard the latest lies from the bazaar, and sold their produce to us at a high rate, instead of having to take it to the nearest town. Thus the arrangement suited all parties.

The Turki house is commodious, since land, timber and mud cost nothing. The rooms are high; the chimneys and fireplaces are good; the doors shut; and there is none of that hugger-mugger squatting round a fire in a place the size of a dog-kennel that is the feature of an Indian peasant's dwelling.

We passed over the low hills and crossed the Yai Dobe plain; in summer, all a hum of mosquitoes and a buzz of pestilent green-eyed horse-flies, but now, thanks to a clear sky and the autumn tints, a fairy-like picture of gold and blue.

The desert poplar or toghrak turns to a delicate

yellow-gold, and against the azure sky quivers and rustles in fascinating contrast. The habit of the tree adds to the charm, and an autumn journey through these poplar forests is one long delight.

So the Yai Dobe plain pleased us, whereas two months earlier we should have been an unhappy mob of harassed, pest-ridden men and animals.

The plain was inhabited by Kirghiz, the Mohammedan nomads of southern Turkestan, and not very nice ones; they were friendly enough. We camped near a dirty house with an even dirtier pond and were joined by a garrulous Sart merchant. It is the custom of the Sart to sally forth from his towns and bazaars and peddle goods with the tent-dwellers, who are invariably swindled. Not that the nomad is a fool, but it is just the usual tale of the countryman and the townsman.

At once this Sart started the eternal wail of Central Asia—a demand for medicine; and he advanced chattering on my head-man, the cold-eyed Abdulla Beg: 'My stomach aches! Such a pain! I cannot sleep at nights; and here, where the cords of my pyjamas are tied, I have a terrible pain; and always after eating melons and peaches! Only five melons and seven pounds of peaches have I eaten to-day! Yet I ache and ache and ache! For God's sake, get the Sahib to give me some medicine!'

He stuck to us closer than a brother; he talked more than a machine; I saw death in Abdulla's eye. He left us sadly with the warning to eat less—an impossible prescription for a Turki.

Yai Dobe is one of those frequent basins in

Central Asia which have no visible external drainage, and a large brackish lagoon was the chief feature of its eastern end. From it was dug salt, a nasty grey salt that burnt the throat and churned up the digestion. It was usually exported to Kashgar in great quantities, and we met strings of donkeys laden with the stuff, in square slabs like paving-stones. Beyond the lake which, protected by a viscous border of soft mud, was difficult to approach, we camped at Tonguslik or Pig Hill, a pleasant spot with good water, willow trees, shade, and a few moribund mosquitoes.

Here the caravan was divided. Ali Khan declared the direct route to Kelpin would end in disaster for us all; death in the desert would be our fate. The local Kirghiz, ever ready to check enterprise in a foreigner, agreed; so it was decided that Abdulla, little Daulat—to distinguish him from big Daulat of Hunza, who was half his size—and I should go round by the reputed good track.

The local croakers croaked more loudly, and the chorus chanted the evils of the road; no water; no wood; no grass; no path but stone and rock and sand up to the animals' knees. So we bade a long and touching farewell to the rest of the caravan, and with Abdulla and a couple of men set out to our doom. One of the men was the Kirghiz guide, a melancholy fellow with a cheerful face and an unusual passion for tea. Might he go to that tent for tea? Or to that one for breakfast? Or might he see an ex-wife in another? And so forth and so on, but we had no bowels of compassion and would let him do nothing that he wanted.

We went up a broad dull valley with grass, tamarisk and a few trees, and we spent the night in the open. It was very cold with a hard frost, and the sky was a deep, clear, blue-black. The Kirghiz was too frightened to sleep, but he could not bolt, as his saddle was lashed to mine, and Abdulla Beg was asleep on them both, thus anchoring the Kirghiz vicariously to the ground.

Next day we passed a Kirghiz ploughing, and crossed a low watershed. We wound down a narrow stony valley, then into a featureless plain with scattered tamarisk and a few plumes of tall grass. There was not a sign of water, but we came on a small child with a herd of mixed animals, and were shown the Kirghiz encampment, pools and thick tamarisk of Tatir.

Here we loitered in the warm sun, swilling tea, washing ourselves, and watching the water-fowl in a small lake. Here, too, we got rid of the Kirghiz, our unwilling guide, who scored off us in the long run, as he told us, as a parting blessing, it was ten years since he had been to Tatir and he had forgotten the road.

A far nicer fellow succeeded him, one Ismail, who rode a mare camel with her foal running beside her. On and on we went in the dark, with the camel making the night hideous by ear-deafening blasts for her offspring. So we finally got bored, lay down amongst the trees of Sargan by two dry wells, and lighted a fire. This attracted a wayfarer of Kelpin who proved a godsend because, in the early morning, Ismail's camel had vanished in search of her child, and so he had to go too. The new arrival had a mare

camel, but its foal was young and stuck close to its mother. It was a strange little mite, with humps like a pair of shaggy bee-hives and long brown hair. On and on we went down a broad, stony, desperately dry valley with the rugged peaks of the Kelpin hills beside it; the brushwood ended, and all we had to burn was the aromatic chiqqan, whose ashes are used to improve or adulterate snuff and tobacco. The Kirghiz provided a large skin of water which gave out a stench that fouled the air for many yards and which the ponies indignantly refused.

This third night was very cold and the stones were hard, and we quite frankly wanted a lot of hot tea, but we managed to keep dry and warm and had no real complaints.

In the freezing dawn we went down into the arid purposeless desert; and suddenly we saw four horsemen, each with a great hunting golden eagle on the left wrist—a splendid sight in this wild and rugged setting. They stopped. Their eagles all cooed gently 'Qush! Qush! Qush!' from which they derived their Turki name—a fascinating, alluring sound, so soft and unexpected from these savage brutes with their great tearing beaks.

At last we saw cultivation and crossed a clear stream, and dashed into a house, where we had a first-rate melon and drank gallons of tea.

After the desert, Kelpin was a pleasant sight as we rode through the orchards of apricot and peach, all dappled with the golden-brown and red of their changing leaves. The crops had mostly been gathered, and the stacks of maize were lying on the roof-tops.

We were directed to the Beg's house and were made very comfortable, but could see no sign of the caravan. In the late afternoon the rest of the party arrived woebegone, lachrymose, and bleating loudly. They had had a miserable time. They had been benighted and marooned, waterless and supperless; they had lost the road and their tempers; and had one great regret—that they had not come with us. Aziza, the cook, had fallen off twice during the night; he had broken his spectacles, lost his water-bottle, and was a very unhappy man. For the next five years the survivors of that journey never ceased to harrow the feelings of all who would listen by their long accounts of their sufferings and privations on the road to Kelpin.

Kelpin was typical of the smaller towns of Turkestan. It consisted of a long bazaar, with all the shops closed for six days in the week; a yamen, where the Chinese magistrate or Amban lived; and some other houses. The day after our arrival was market-day and the shops were open; and a surging mass of people thronged the bazaar, as the whole population gathered there, and a very busy scene it was. These bazaar-days are always attractive, and the amount of eating that is done is remarkable. The women especially come in from miles to have a really good stuff of mantos (dumplings) and the other dishes of the limited Turki menu. The food is good—plain, well cooked and very filling.

When we entered the bazaar the crowd followed us, and we had to retire to the Beg's house. It was a pity, as we badly needed exercise. At 8 a.m. a large

breakfast had been put before me. I had innocently eaten it, not imagining that at 10 a.m. a gigantic pilau would have to be eaten. But when, two hours later, the Amban summoned me to the yamen and made me eat a really well-cooked dinner of twelve substantial courses—he had a Sart as cook—I felt that I should never again want to see food, and that the only thing to do was to walk all day to work off these repasts.

The inhabitants of Kelpin are isolated from the rest of the country, and are said to be clannish and inclined to keep off other Turkis. We found them very pleasant and less Mongolian in feature than many townsmen elsewhere and therefore less mixed in blood.

We had a long march on leaving Kelpin, as in Central Asia the stages are determined by the presence or otherwise of water, so that when the Amban suggested a day with the hawkers, I had to refuse and bade him a formal farewell. He had been very kind it seemed to me—especially as I probably bored him.

So we slunk away early from Kelpin in charge of a pudding-faced soldier, hoping to escape before we were discovered. But it was no use. The pudding-faced one soon gave a cry and pointed to a large mob rapidly gaining on us. There indeed was the Amban in his sporting get-up, a huge ulster, sage-green socks, goloshes, a dark blue silk gown and a Homburg hat. He was all smiles and exuded affability, and behind him came the burgesses of Kelpin, young and old, great and small. The whole scene was hospitable, picturesque and dusty. Every one was

friendly, and we felt ungracious brutes to want to get on with our journey. The smooth soft cries of the hooded eagles rose above the chatter.

The most intelligent living creature in Turkestan is the gazelle, and he will seldom let any mounted man approach within two miles, so it was not strange to see, far away in the quivering mirage, two small objects moving like lightning. We galloped after them, loosed the eagles, and failed. We had a blank day but an amusing one, and at last we decided to give it up. We sat down accordingly and ate, for, without food, there is nothing done in Central Asia. The Amban produced excellent bread and a fine melon, and we quietly stuffed, while far away I could see my caravan wandering in the foothills. We made our farewell and hurried after the baggage, and camped that night in a narrow valley with a clear stream and many chikor calling in the brushwood. During the middle of the night some people came up to the camp and next morning approached me. They were three men and a woman, and had come twenty miles as they had heard that a foreigner was in the neighbourhood. The drugs of the West have a great and too often undeserved reputation in the East, and so the poor woman had induced her menfolk to bring her to me. She, poor soul, was long past all human help, but, to comfort her, I gave her some harmless tablets and refused her gift of a bag of apricot kernels. A good hospital and a travelling doctor would save many lives and much suffering in Central Asia. At present between Kashgar and Urumchi (a distance of 800 miles) no skilled aid can be had;

and nowhere in the whole of the immense province of Sinkiang is there any modern equipment even of the most modest kind, without which no small hospital in Europe could exist.

For the next three days we traversed the arid and forbidding outlying hills of the main range of the Tien Shan. The track led through a precipitous gorge some 300 feet high and a few feet wide—just enough for a laden pony to pass. The lack of water was trying, and great was our joy when Ali Khan announced that he had found some. We all rushed to a large pool in the rock and lovingly ladled out the water. It was stagnant, and stinking of urine, repulsive to animals and men ; and we spent a night of drought, with mouths like pumice-stone. We much needed something to drink for a furious dust-storm had struck us on the Magpie Pass, and this filthy pool was a cruel hoax.

We did manage, before we reached Uch Turfan, to find a little water, and we pestered the passers-by with our questions. They were cunning and knew the tricks of the game ; and all assured us that, just round the corner, we should find what we needed. Hour after hour passed, and corners innumerable were turned, but we only got our fill when we finally reached the town.

CHAPTER II

UCH TURFAN TO AQSU AND KUCHA

UCH TURFAN, or Crooked Turfan, is as pleasant a place as can be found anywhere. It is a small straggling town on the Taushkan or Hare River close to the mountain and surrounded by fertile fields. There is a fort of mud on one of the rocky conical hills that run through the town ; and there is the garden of the 'Nine Springs,' with a dummy junk on which the Chinese officials give their entertainments.

It was evening as we reached Uch Turfan, crossing an endless stretch of sloping grey stony 'sai' or desert. The peaks of the Tien Shan glittered above the yellow mist that enshrouded the town, and we saw the clear galloping channels of the Hare River beyond.

We stayed with Abdul Qadir, a notable, who put us up in his summer-house though we were three months too late for this. Our host was most hospitable, but we had descended on him without warning and it was the best that he could do for us. We were all well fed at Uch Turfan. Our host fed us daily and frequently, and the Chinese gave an immense dinner where the guests drank quarts of the most potent spirit as though it were water, and much joviality prevailed. Food was very cheap, and the

bread particularly good, so that afterwards it was the usual standard of comparison whenever we wanted to discuss bread—and that was very often. We could well have tarried longer at Uch Turfan, but although our host was the most generous of men, his large guest-room with enormous unglazed windows was too much for me in the keen cold of early winter. I could not stay in bed all day, and out of it I was never warm, and as my servants were chattering with cold, even though they were eating all day as hard as they could, we had to resume the journey.

Before us lay the city of Aqsu, famous for its rice, its goitres, its quaint streets, and overwhelming dinginess. Beyond it were two other cities on our road to the north, Bai and Kucha, and of these two places we heard much that was praiseworthy and little that was true. ‘ Wait till you get to Kucha ’ was the watchword of all who talked to us.

So we went south to Aqsu, and then north and east to these two places, with a short detour to examine the hill country between them.

When we left Uch Turfan, we crossed the clear blue river and passed under the ubiquitous bluffs of loess as we skirted the main range of the Tien Shan on our way to Aqsu. In many of the valleys the Chinese had forts, and the brave garrisons were in all the panoply of winter dress—usually all hair and sheepskin—and sometimes with a kitchen mop as a cap. The frontier is long and intricate and most difficult to supervise.

The journey was a cold one but we were well rewarded by the purchase of our dog, Kainchi. We

needed a dog badly, and as we marched on we met some Kirghiz shepherds with their dogs. Abdulla at once said we must have one, and, after much bargaining, we bought one, price four bodkins and nine pence. The Kirghiz were delighted, as they were certain they had got something for nothing, relying on the dog bolting off at the first opportunity. Poor Kainchi had a miserable time. He was more like a wolf than a dog both in disposition and appearance. He was tied to a donkey and trotted beside that obstinate beast. In the open it was all right; in the enclosed country it was not so, for the donkey would go one side of a bush or rock and Kainchi the other. In a few days, however, this trying apprenticeship was over, and for two years Kainchi was with us, a most amusing, intelligent, gentle and faithful dog, letting us do anything with him and never objecting.

At one place, Sheikhle, we stayed perforce at the Mullah's, a dour man who eyed us with disfavour; which was inexcusable, as we always paid well.

'Ah!' said the Hunza men, Daulat and Abdulla, 'always the same with these Mullahs, small hands—and large stomachs. Let us see what he has.'

So they rummaged through the house and found it well stocked with food of all kinds—melons, onions, and, best of all, a newly killed bullock lying in the best parlour. Our unwilling host wheezed mournfully around demanding medicine for his asthma. He was brutally told to do his duty to his guests. We had by now discovered that the much-advertised Turki hospitality was a myth, a joke of some facetious

traveller. The Turki will never entertain anyone unless compelled, and, since he makes no exception between nearest relatives and distant strangers, all are turned away unless they have the strength of mind and arm to prevent it. There are exceptions—very pleasant ones too—but, generally, in a land where food is particularly cheap and abundant, true hospitality is as rare as true morality.

This Mullah, we found subsequently, had killed a camel in his wife's boudoir—a secluded spot far removed from the gaze of the greedy or the curious—and even Daulat could not get any of the meat.

We hated the Mullah and, no doubt, he hated us ; and we left him gladly. But he scored off us in the end as his curses, though silent, were potent, for as Aziza, the cook, rode blithely out of the gate, his horse fell stone-dead and the Mullah at once seized the corpse to distribute to his friends.

We had pleasant winter weather on our journey to Aqsu, which meant that the sky was clear and the sun bright—phenomena by no means ordinary at any time of the year in Turkestan where a heavy pall of fine dust hangs over the country for weeks on end.

As we rode along we saw on our left the main range of the Tien Shan, and even in the lower valleys some spruce trees appeared. Fresh snow glistened on the lower peaks that divided China from Russia, and so crystal was the atmosphere that even the hills of Kelpin to the south became brilliant pinnacles in a lake of azure air. But despite the sun, winter was coming on apace, and the countryside looked often very bleak and cold.

On November 29th we arrived without mishap at Aqsu, which is one of the largest towns of Turkestan, and an agricultural centre with very little external trade at any time and still less since the road to Russia had been closed. It exports a great deal of rice, and the produce of the district is both cheap and good.

There is a family likeness between all these towns of Turkestan that is apt to irritate. The streets, houses and general make-up are all very much alike. There are the same grey mud walls, the same dingy coverings to the bazaars (which make the streets stuffy in summer, cold and dank in winter, and airless at all times); the same beggars and the same crowd in the streets.

Once a week, on bazaar-day, the towns of the country burst into life. The country folk flock to the town to buy, sell, eat and gossip, and very bright and stimulating the place is and a great contrast to the other days of the week. The cook-shops drive a flourishing business; the rag-and-bone merchants issue from their lairs; holocausts of hapless animals are slain, and the butchers' shops become shambles and the haunt of the pariah dogs of the town. Everything is cheaper on a bazaar-day than at any other time. Shops are opened which are firmly shut for the rest of the week, and in many places it is only on bazaar-day that purchases can be made. The servants always wanted to stay over a bazaar-day, and Ali Khan, the caravan-bashi, made a point of buying his supplies then.

The streets are often enlivened by fortune-tellers

and Kirghiz or other nomads, with their falcons and eagles on their wrists; and everywhere the quacks ply a brisk business with dozens of bags, dirty half-empty bottles, and little boxes all spread out to seize or imprison, and doubtless to slay, every passing germ.

There was a Pathan doctor at Aqsu who particularly pleased us. He sat in the bazaar with his bags beside him, which, according to Daulat and Abdulla, held only common salt or a little soda, and a pair of old broken binoculars in his hand. The Pathan had blue spectacles on his hawk-like nose, and as his patients approached he asked their symptoms and examined them with his pair of field-glasses. After a long and learned stare through the broken lens, he announced his diagnosis, took his fee, gave the prescription, and sent off his patient as pleased and contented as though he had been interviewing the leading light of medicine in a European capital.

These Turki towns possess so few differences that it is often difficult to tell one from another. Aqsu struck us as cheap. The people were undoubtedly far dirtier and more diseased than at Yarkand or Kashgar; goitre seemed unusually prevalent and, though every one was well-nourished (as is the case throughout Turkestan) there was not too much money about. There were signs of Aqsu's bygone glory in the coloured tiles of some of the mosques and the lattice-work and overhanging balconies of many houses; but on the whole the town did not make a favourable impression.

We stayed with a Qazi, a pleasant man with a

very disagreeable wife. He, poor man, was under a cloud, as he had used his position, as one of the four chief Mohammedan judges of the town, to sell his judgments, had unfortunately been found out, and sentenced to be suspended for six months. This meant a great loss of income, since he could exercise none of his functions. We stayed several times with this Qazi, and even his wife mellowed in time, and actually offered to do our laundry. He was a nice fellow certainly, but an amazing fool. He regained his powers but again let himself be bribed, and finally lost his nice house and garden and frittered away his substance. In no place so much as Turkestan is a family liable to lose all its patrimony and possessions through sheer folly.

Eight miles from the old town is the new Chinese city, and thither I went on a road deep in dust, below a high cliff of loess. Mr. Ju, the Taotai, or Governor, of Aqsu was the best-known man in the province and had entertained many generatons of travellers; it would be impossible to find a more courteous host. He was a mandarin of the old type, polite, well-informed and highly intelligent. He had a good cook, a most comfortable (even luxurious) yamen, and plenty of conversation. There is no foreigner who passes through Aqsu without taking away many pleasant memories of Mr. Ju. His garden was beautiful in summer and, in winter, his greenhouse held geraniums, cactus and other plants that seemed out of place in this remote country.

We were destined to see much more of Aqsu, as it is so skilfully sited that no one can avoid it.

No matter how one may try to dodge the place —and we did often try hard—it is extremely difficult to escape a visit to its dirty bazaar and ragged population.

We left on a bitterly cold day, in a haze like a London fog. A freezing, knife-like wind cut our limbs to pieces; the leaden sky depressed us, and the great expanse of graves, large and small, ornate, fantastic, simple or ruined, that stretched out drab and dreary for miles on the bluff above the town, was an inauspicious means of exit. Indeed, the necropolis of Aqsu is famous for its extent and variety. Tombs of every shape, sort and size abounded, and we marvelled that mud could be worked into such ingenious patterns.

The road was a frequented one, and the country at first well-settled; so we were greeted by many shopkeepers selling their wares. The chief article was the manto, the boiled meat dumpling of Turkestan, very good when well made but, as sold to the passing traveller, not particularly appetising, as the dough is tough and often old and the meat inside is small in quantity and often tough and flavourless as well. Sometimes we had to buy them, and they needed much care in selection. All the same, a hot manto is not to be despised on a cold winter's morning, and it is much better than the soup sold, which was very wishy-washy sort of stuff—a pound of meat to six quarts of water, so my men averred.

We left the main road at the little shabby hamlet of Jam, and turned to the north to skirt the foothills of the mountains and finally to reach the large town of

Kucha. The district was a great salt-producing one, but of a like quality to that of Yai Dobe. Everywhere donkeys carrying large slabs of grey salt, looking like paving-stones and almost as heavy, were met with.

We crossed the Musart River and traversed the interesting uplands of Qarabagh, or the Black Garden, a common name for many places, though why I have never discovered. Hereabouts several small streams flow from the mountains and irrigate a wide area. Although trees were scarce and the husbandry poor, the soil was good and the crops abundant. The inhabitants were nearly all immigrants from other towns and probably not always of the best type.

We stayed for some time at a small house belonging to an old couple, and we were really quite comfortable. The man and his wife were desperately poor. They cultivated a piece of land—and a very small piece too—on the Metayer system, and their share was miserable. In the morning they ate some very unpleasant greyish barley bread, and some macaroni in the evening. Their two sons were out in service, and their daughter was married to a melon-faced lout who looked after the little property. A small cow, a gaunt starved horse and three scavenging donkeys comprised the farm animals.

Poverty such as this is unusual in Turkestan, where, whatever there may be on a man's back, there is plenty in his belly. The old man said that his parents had died young and that he had had to sell and eat his land. The people were very kindly; they mended all our clothes and were most attentive

to our wants, and, I hope, appreciated what we paid them.

Near here we tried to acquire a new dog from a certain Haji, who had a famous pack. He refused to give us one, but bade us take one, and we managed to capture a brute far more like a wolf than any dog we had ever seen. After a battle lasting an hour, which resulted in most of us being bitten, we had to give up the attempt, and the dog got away —to our great sorrow, for he would have been a magnificent watch-dog. When we returned a year later, we found that all the pack had died of some disease.

We stayed some time in Qarabagh, as supplies were cheap and the horses wanted a rest. We left the old couple after a week and went to Terek (Poplar), a charming little village in the lower folds of the mountains, with beautifully clear water and ridge after ridge of rugged hills near it. Our quarters were extremely comfortable, as good as any European house in India.

One of the blessings of Turkestan is the excellent bread. It is for sale in the bazaars, and in outlying places the women will bake the flour for a few coppers. The ovens are always outside the house; they are large and circular, rather like inverted bee-hives, but with a narrow orifice and a hole at the bottom. The whole is made of mud. A fire is kindled inside, and when the oven is heated the fire is taken out and the dough cakes are plastered against the hot clay sides. A newly baked loaf, hot from the oven, is delicious—savoury and crisp and about as like the

deadly slab of leather eaten in India, as an English roll is to a French one. There are many kinds of bread made in the country, but it is always possible to buy a really good kind, and the lot of the traveller is greatly eased in consequence. The clay ovens have short lives, and there are usually several to be seen round a house. Indeed, on one occasion I counted no less than twenty-four derelict ones.

We attended several Turki entertainments. In India music and dancing are often regarded as improper, undignified, or even degrading, but the Turki is not such an ass. He loves dancing and delights in music, and in the evening the house would be crowded.

In one corner sat the musicians, playing on long-necked mandolines and small tambourines. Both sexes danced, but usually not together. At the end of each dance a whip was handed to the next couple, who, as a point of etiquette, had to dance. The dancing is dignified, restrained and rather graceful, but monotonous to the European, though passionately liked by the people. The expenses of the musicians were met by all the performers—an arrangement worthy of introduction into the West. China bowls were passed round for the contributions and were then covered with a cloth and rattled over the dancers' heads so that all could know that the musicians had been paid—copper cash well shaken makes a most opulent noise—and were then emptied by the side of the players. The only refreshments provided were tea, and only the musicians had it. The long winter evenings passed pleasantly enough in

this fashion, although the rooms grew very hot and stuffy.

We were very sorry to leave Qarabagh, which we revisited several times, but did not again enjoy ourselves so much. Our stay was much facilitated by the kindness of some Kirghiz, who, driven out of Russian territory, had settled in the district. The Qarabaghliks disliked the nomads, but we blessed them, as they provided all that we wanted.

Our road next led us to the town of Bai, and on the way we enjoyed a good squabble, which enlivened the whole caravan and gave us subject for talk for many weeks. It all arose because Kainchi, the dog, went for an impertinent mongrel who attacked him as he was walking peacefully along. We went to the rescue, and the Turki owner of the dog came out to attack Ali Khan. He tore off his clothes. He screamed with rage. His womenfolk picked up huge rocks and tried to batter in Ali Khan's head, while others lobbed missiles at us. No damage was done, and we cleared off from the battlefield thoroughly pleased with ourselves. I fancy both sides claimed the victory.

Although Bai is famous for its poultry, it is not an attractive town; but we were doomed to visit it many times, and every time disliked it more. It is notorious as being a cold place even in summer. Masses of filth always lay in its streets; the people were diseased and goitre-stricken; and we left the place with joy. It had one merit, cheapness, and two good points, large poultry and fine eggs.

The Ambans here seemed unlucky, as no less than

three of them died during our stay in the country. The first one sent us an embarrassing present of a roast sheep, which was kindly meant but of little use. Bai lived up to its reputation for cold; it snowed a good deal, and the huge vault-like house belonging to a stingy Haji chilled us to the marrow. We had bought a new dog at Terek and he fought with Kainchi, who had to be put in a huge basket and lashed on to a pony. The motion made the poor dog very sick, but he did not mind it and realised it was the only way he could travel. The dogs were everlastingly getting bitten, thanks to their numerous fights, and often had to be carried, to the astonishment of the people, who could not understand it.

In a country like Chinese Turkestan, a really good dog is invaluable, but such animals are not easily come by. We were always buying dogs and getting rid of them, as they usually proved useless. They were of two types—one which yapped and howled all night, the other which merely ate and slept; and we passed on these creatures quickly. It was remarkable how soon these animals yielded to kindness. Terek, whom we bought in Qarabagh, was always ready to bite if anyone went near him, but when he was used to us he could be handled in any way. He never, however, became so affectionate as Kainchi, whose upbringing was far wilder. These two dogs became inseparable friends and conducted all their iniquities together. Kainchi never stole. Terek always did, and would go round the camp a night removing any food he could find to eat. No

place was safe from him. He also had a trick of quietly going by the bakers' shops in the bazaar and taking what he could find without being discovered. We had to give him away at last to Father Veldman of Manas. He did not live long, as he fought a great battle with another dog and died of his honourable wounds.

We again thought it more interesting to avoid the main road from Bai to Kucha, so we turned north and traversed the cultivated area that lay at the foot of the hill. As always, there was more waste land than cultivation, but we managed to find a comfortable house at night. Owing to the bitter cold, camping was undesirable, but in Turkestan there is always some sort of shelter, if there are any inhabitants. At the first house at which we put up we made a good fire and settled down to a warm night, but, alas, the house caught fire! It sounds very serious, but happily mud cannot burn; it was only the wooden fireplace, and the fire was soon dealt with. There can be no other country in the world where fireplaces are made of wood; but it is often so in Kashgaria, even though coal is used. We had a long march the next day over an utterly barren tract without water, fuel or shelter. It was imperative to start early, and so we did. I found, however, that the man supplied by the yamen at Bai was taking us the wrong road, and an uproar ensued. The useless guide was attacked vigorously, and knelt in the snow, imploring forgiveness. It was an absurd scene, especially as Aziza, the cook, fell off his horse, and joined his tears with those of the Turki. At last,

ruffled and delayed, we resumed our march. It was a comic interlude, and as a result of our treatment of him the Turki turned out an excellent and useful attendant for the rest of the way, and was delighted to see us when we revisited Bai.

Aziza could generally be relied on to enliven the daily routine. Perhaps one of his absurdities that amused me most was when he tied his horse to the wooden perch of an eagle, on which the bird was sleeping comfortably in the courtyard. All went well until it woke up and flapped its wings. This startled the horse and it bolted, and eagle, perch and pony, with Aziza and the falconer running after, all disappeared across country in a crescendo of squawking and banging—a ridiculous sight.

At one house the old lady watched my bed being made, and was astonished at the blankets I needed—only three—but she was still more astonished when she learnt that I slept alone in a room and was not afraid of doing so.

The chief place between Bai and Kucha, on the upper road, is Kere Bazaar, which is just a bazaar and nothing more. It is, however, the centre of a pleasant, well-cultivated district. We found the houses large and the people prosperous, and we stayed with a well-to-do old lady. She had a middle-aged son, but his mother managed everybody and everything, and was preparing to go to Mecca in the spring. My room was quite well furnished, with large and very dusty oleanders in pots—where do these oleanders come from? I have never seen them growing

wild in Turkestan—strings of onions, many teapots, a cricket belt, and such-like treasures.

We were glad we went by the upper road, although the distances were longer and the tracks often bad; for there was a great fascination, difficult to explain, in this sub-montane tract. Between the mountains themselves and the plain there was a strange medley of low hills and cultivation. The hills are often so eroded as to assume the strangest shapes, and at Kan the sandstone ranges sank down into deep narrow crevasses, up which one wandered—so dark that the sun hardly penetrated, so narrow and tortuous that direction was difficult, and so steep that it was rarely possible to ascend the sides. From the top of the range one looked over a great mottled jumble of these variegated sandstone hills and ravines, waterless, rather barren, and astonishing in their water-worn shapes. If the sun was bright, these fantastic spurs glowed with purple, and beyond them were the snowy peaks of the Central Tien Shan. Towards the plains the atmosphere was opaque, but the tall poplars on the fringes of the settlement could always be seen; and, if the weather was at all warm, one felt as if gazing into a furnace.

Far away were the rare rivers stealing to the plain, escaping from the men of the uplands, who were for ever laying hands on their store of water. In winter the Kucha River was a blue and docile stream, flowing through lofty ranges of scarlet sandstone, then past Kan and the narrow gorge with its old Buddhist towns on either side, until it reached the sai of Kucha, the sloping, stony, shimmering desert, where it was

seized, confined, and turned into the apricot groves and fields of the district.

On the last day of 1927 we rode into Kucha. We were very cold and very cross, but Abdulla Beg had made excellent arrangements for us at the house of a namesake of his.

CHAPTER III

KUCHA AND KORLA

KUCHA is one of the six cities of Turkestan, for the Sart knows his country as the Land of the Six Cities. It has a great reputation, but I have never found out why. We visited the place often and at different times of the year, but we none of us really cared for it. We did not like the people, the bazaar, the climate, or the situation. Turki towns are all so much alike that it is not easy to say where the difference lay, but Kucha somehow or other did not appeal to us. It was a deadly cold place, and yet the shopkeepers sat before their shops all day long in the Arctic bazaar with no warmth whatever—a great tribute to their fortitude and selfishness. As a matter of fact, the Turki endures cold wonderfully well. Apparently he sinks into a kind of torpor, which lasts through the winter, or else his brain is naturally so lethargic that it does not react to extremes of temperature.

The dark, gloomy bazaar, heavily screened against the far-off heat of summer, with its contents all frozen, seemed sinister in the short days of winter. We also disliked the prices asked and the manners of the people. The bazaar was well stocked, as the town is a great trading centre, from which roads to

all parts of the province radiate. The two specialities of Kucha are apricots and pears.

The apricot is little grown in Chinese Turkestan, and only successfully on a large scale at Kucha, where there is an immense export business. The fruit is dried, the stone removed, and the kernel extracted and then placed between the dried fruit, which has also been washed. The result is a very attractive form of dried apricot of a golden colour with an eye of white formed by the kernel.

The pears are highly esteemed and are also grown at Korla, a neighbouring town. The fruit is orange-yellow, rather hard, very sweet and juicy, and without any real flavour.

We searched Kucha for places of interest but, apart from the Buddhist remains, there is nothing to see. The mosques were all new and ugly, the buildings in the town were commonplace, and the bridge over a stream in the middle of the bazaar was perhaps the only thing of interest. Kucha, however, boasted one European inhabitant, Fröken Lovisa Engvall, who had lived for many years in the town, and did much good among the poor, who highly esteemed her medical skill. She lived alone with her Ladaki servant and seldom saw any of her countrymen.

Another well-known figure was Safdar Ali, the former Mir of Hunza, near Gilgit, who had fled when the British entered his country. He was a kindly, jovial old man, but desperately poor and a pathetic figure in his ragged clothes. He had forgotten his native tongue, but he remembered his Persian and

neatly capped a quotation from Hafiz. Thirty-five years of exile, penury and hardship had not daunted his courage or spoilt his temper, and whatever his deeds were, he cannot be judged by the standards of Whitehall; and he fared badly at the hands of his friends and his enemies.

People were hospitable in Kucha, and there were more entertainments than I cared for, as no European can ever get used to the enormous repasts of Central Asia. A Tartar gave me a noble entertainment, at which a Persian sang well but mournfully, with his elbows on the table, and so full of food that his songs finally sank into a lullaby and he went to sleep.

The Chinese Amban also gave a big dinner to a number of people, and produced large 'pressure' lamps to illuminate the place. They were a novelty and much admired.

There were a number of British Indian subjects, whose doyen was a fine old man of ninety-two, and they came and had a meal with us. These fellow-subjects are usually pleased to meet one, as they have rather a trying life in Turkestan. Although the majority of them are orthodox Mohammedans, the Turki dislikes anyone who is not of his race, and especially resents the presence of people cleverer and more energetic than he is, just as all men naturally dislike the possessors of qualities which have been denied to themselves. We were very cold at Kucha and it seemed impossible to get warm even at night, with a ton of blankets over us, so that we were not sorry when it was time for us to go, though we little

realised what was before us in the way of low temperatures. After our hospitable stay at Kucha, we set forth once more. Frankly, we were disappointed with the town, but our bellies were very full after all the gorging. The Kashmiris had grown plump, the pony-men had been stuffing ceaselessly, and even the men of Hunza were losing the angles they had brought from their own hard country, and their figures were rounding suitably to their easy life. We still continued east, always along the southern slopes of the Tien Shan.

We now took the main road to Qarashahr and Urumchi, and as winter is the best season for travelling on the plain we found much traffic on the road. We constantly passed Sart merchants, perched high and precariously on a pile of saddle-bags, like a pea on a thimble, and ambling along in a desperate hurry to get to the next tea-house. Huge wagons, dragged by sweating horses steaming, and often covered with white frost (for they travel through the night) and laden with all kinds of rubbish, were everlastingly met, lurching, swaying and creaking along the heavy unmetalled roads. Strings of camels, hairy, dumpy and very picturesque, with bundles of cloth or cotton, led by a man on a donkey, and with bells tolling slowly, were always the pleasantest sights on the road. And always there were donkeys—droves of them—laden or empty. They are the chief mode of transport in the country and certainly the cheapest.

We were always being accosted by other riders, and many questions were asked us. The Turki

loves asking questions, but he hates answering any, unless it is about food, horses or bazaar prices. On these subjects he is eloquent; on anything else he has nothing to say. As he believes everything that is told him, there is not much fun in talking to him, but Abdulla and Daulat never tired of palming off the most outrageous fables on the poor Sart.

Thus we used to beguile the tedium of the road, for, truly, travelling on the plain of Turkestan is monotonous. To begin with, nine-tenths of the route is over dasht (desert), with not an animal, bird or insect to be seen, but with a vast, interminable, gloomy expanse of desert on either side. An occasional hovel with a well of bitter water breaks the stage and marks the onward passage. Travellers jog along in a sort of coma, congenial, even natural, to the Turki, but boring to the quicker-witted Indian.

The pony-men used to take much snuff as they walked along swinging their arms across their bodies and cursing the pack-animals. The snuff was chewed, being flung into the mouth from the open palm, on which it was poured from a small bottle made of a gourd stained red or yellow.

At one time we carried mouth-organs and blew vulgarly as we rode. Another amusement was to make the yayeh or guide from the yamen sing. The first invitation was usually declined, but after a little coaxing and encouragement the man would drop his reins on his horse's neck, throw back his head, and sing loudly. The Turki sings well, but all are not nightingales.

Sometimes we had a guide who could talk, but this was a rare bit of luck, and the old topics of conversation were seldom changed. So it was natural enough for the passing stranger to be stopped and interrogated, and a great deal of amusement we got out of such encounters, for Daulat and Abdulla were very nimble with their tongues.

This was a dismal road to the north, through the Eastern Tien Shan, and do what we could, we found it irksome. Beyond Bugur the cold grew severe. It was too cold to ride, too cold to walk; and long icicles hung from our moustaches. We were experiencing what the Chinese call the 'Sixty Days' Cold.'

We passed the famous shrine of Qara Chacha Ata, or Father Black Hair, which was not far from the prosperous, comfortable village of Yangi Hissar. This was a wonderful place, and we all devoutly dismounted and timidly approached the miraculous spring of tepid water which possessed the power of turning grey hair black and of preventing black hair turning grey. Indeed, in the case of women, not merely does the hair remain black but it grows long and lustrous. The water is exported as far north as Urumchi. The Sheikh in charge was ninety-five, and he had obtained the post by marrying his predecessor's daughter. The union was indeed blest, for he had now a hundred and twenty descendants, all supported by the wonder-working shrine. We all washed and drank, and the Kashmiris prayed and bathed. We went on our road thankful and still firm believers in the efficacy of the water—even

though the hair and beard of the Sheikh were patriarchally white and not very thick. In this district we were struck by the beautifully clear and grammatical Turki which the people spoke. They are said to be immigrants from Kashgar, but theirs was not the Kashgar dialect.

The apples were excellent in a country where good apples were scarce, and at Bugur in particular the gardens and orchards were renowned. Their owners were most industrious and very keen on money-making, and on a bazaar-day the country was deserted. Almost every one had been to Mecca or else was going there, and there was quite an atmosphere of piety and prosperity.

Farther along the road before we reached Korla there were some settlements of Doulans, the race that dwells in the south in the country by the Yarkand River and who have lost all their distinctive characteristics except perhaps their love of dirt and music. Here we found them speaking with a ridiculous drawl which made them the butt of their neighbours.

At Korla we reached the last truly Sart town and said farewell to the homogeneous land of the Six Cities. Beyond us, there were hybrid populations, mongrel towns, and the inevitable uncertainty and indefiniteness of a nomad and immigrant existence. The Sart sticks to his bazaar and his fields until he is forced out of them to earn his living. Beyond the limits of his country the population is floating. Thus it is that there exists in Northern Sinkiang a curious instability and restlessness.

We found Korla to be a small but flourishing town with a fine river that rushed from a defile in the low hills through which our future road led. The people were surly, disobliging and well-to-do. We put up in an immense Tungan inn with paper windows and no fireplaces, and we chattered with cold, which a fire of a few poplar sticks on the floor failed to banish. We had now reached a definitely Tungan area. These people are the Mohammedans of China, about whom much has been written and there has been much discussion. They are not orthodox in certain respects, but they observe most of the tenets of Islam. It is said that the Tungan has Arab blood in his veins, but whatever he has he is a conspicuously able man. I do not say 'lovable,' for he is a hard, relentless business man, keen on a bargain, practical and thorough. He is disliked by all other races, especially by the Chinese, against whom he has frequently rebelled, and the consequence of these rebellions is seen in the ruined cities and abandoned fields north of the Tien Shan.

The Tungan is certainly a problem. Few Europeans ever speak well of him. Personally, we always got on well with them, and, looking back, I can recall many acts of real kindness and hospitality at their hands.

Korla was an expensive place because it lies at the edge of the cultivated districts and exports its produce to feed the desert and mountain tracts.

We acquired merit at Korla. As we rode along we saw, sticking out from under the ice of a canal, the leg of a donkey, and for some reason we decided

to pull it out. We all tugged and tugged, and, finally, we dragged on to the road a real donkey, frozen but alive, and handed it back to the mutton-headed chump of a Turki who owned it but had made no effort to rescue it.

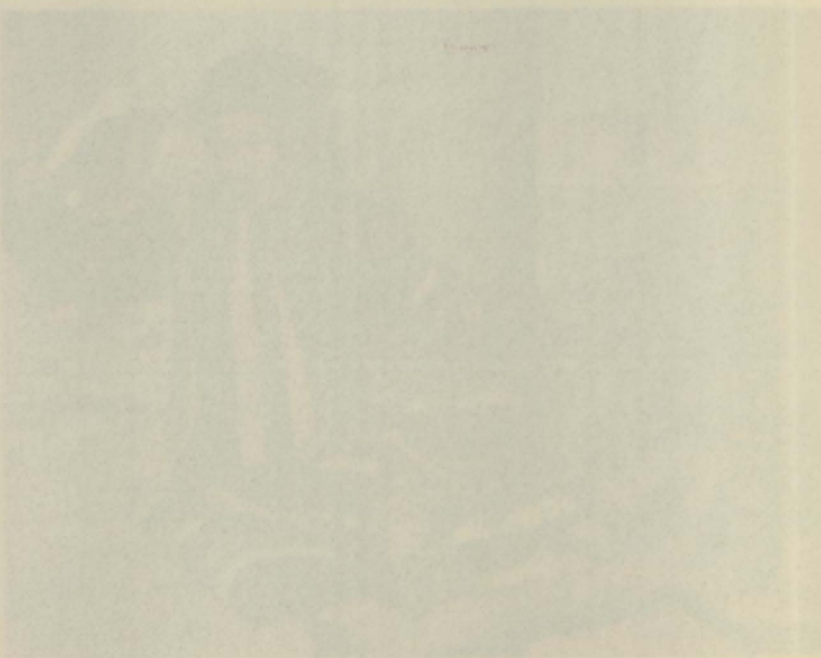
CHAPTER IV

THE COLD ROAD TO URUMCHI

We did not stay long in Korla. It was far too cold in the serai, and Ali Khan complained of the prices in the bazaar. The Amban was a Mohammedan from Kumul (Hami) and not a very interesting person—perhaps he did not get as much as he expected out of us. Our route now led north and the character of our journey changed completely. It was as well that we were uncomfortable at Korla for before us were the horrors of the road to Urumchi, and we were now leaving the comforts of the south. We had heard much of this road to the capital which traversed as dismal and arid a region as any highway in the world, bitterly cold in winter, blazing hot in summer, dusty, with no fuel, no water, tottering hovels for accommodation and nothing to eat. So we were told, till our livers became as water, and our tongues cleaved to our jaws. It was all more or less true, as it turned out. We felt we had better go on and have done with it. The Turki has many faults, but he is clean and amenable; his houses and his shops add to the comfort of the traveller, and his whole country is settled. We now were entering a country where permanent settlement was the exception. Every one was a squatter who hoped one



A Kashgar Girl Spinning



[illegible] a region as any higher [illegible] blazing hot [illegible] no fuel, no water, former[illegible] and nothing to eat. [illegible] become as water, and [illegible] It was all more [illegible] We felt we had better go [illegible] has many [illegible] his houses and [illegible] comfort of the traveller, and [illegible] is needed. We now were [illegible] permanent settlement was [illegible] was a squatter who hoped [illegible]

day to leave his farm or his shop and go back to his native place.

Cold as Kashgar may be in winter, it is nothing to the bitter climate of Zungaria, as the region north of the Tien Shan is called. We were still far from that region, but we noticed as we went north a harshness reflected in everything—in the crops and trees, the lower standard of comforts and the greater struggle for existence.

At first the views were charming as we passed through a defile in the hill, with the blue Konche River on our right and well-wooded settlements huddled at the mountain's foot.

This did not last long. After passing coal mines we entered a broad plain of reed and salt marsh with a few patches of cultivation. In the middle of this dreary expanse lay Qarashahr, the Black City—a suitable sobriquet for this squalid midden of filth and decay. It is said to be the dirtiest town in Asia, but there are other favoured competitors for this honour.

It was the centre of the Torgut Kalmuck region and unwashed Mongols thronged the streets. We found the broad sluggish river frozen solid, and crossed conveniently, and soon realised what sort of a place we had come to.

The Torgut Mongols have an unenviable reputation for great filth, which an intimate knowledge of them confirms, so that it is natural enough for their chief rallying place to reflect the habits of the people. Qarashahr was full of Kalmucks—and the streets of refuse. The cold, nipping wind froze the loathsome

ordure and blew about the long grimy black pig-tails of the women, which were encased in greasy umbrella-covers. The whole aspect of the city, with its ruined houses and crumbling walls, its grimy blear-eyed population, its rancid smell and mountains of frozen filth and offal, was dismal in the extreme, and we rejoiced that there was little to detain us.

We called on the Taotai, Wang, a very old man, and one of the most charming and courteous men I met in Central Asia. He returned my call in a ramshackle pony-carriage, and I felt ashamed that this frail old man should be put out on my account.

The military commander was a Tungan or Chinese Mohammedan, even older than the Taotai, but a tall upright man who came clattering along on a fine black horse with a bridle of jingling steel and a gorgeous scarlet saddle-cloth. I was much impressed by the courtesy of these two old men to a mere foreigner. The Amban was another pleasant person, and, as I said good-bye to him on the steps of his yamen, two excited Tungans rushed up to him, flung themselves at his feet, knocking their foreheads on the ground, wailing, shrieking and crying out. They had been fighting and were much disordered. I left the Amban gazing down at them, remote and unmoved.

With so much dirt there was naturally disease at Qarashahr, and I was constantly importuned for medicine, but I really could not distribute drugs to the mob.

It was well below zero when we left the town. Far on our right was the Baghrash Kol or Tengris

Nor, the large lake which produces excellent fish—a kind of carp—which are sent, frozen hard, all over the country during the winter months.

There is a Chinese proverb which says that the traveller does not repair the inn ; so perhaps it was for that reason that all the halting-places along the road were in the last stages of dirt and decay. We sometimes slept in places which no decent pig would have entered, but so penetrating was the cold that any shelter was welcome.

The road lay through the mountains and was weary and depressing. There was no vegetation and consequently no fuel. The water was usually brackish, and for 125 miles there was only one small settlement at Kumush, where we stayed for two nights with very friendly Tungans. As we rode along one day, we were caught up by a Pathan, a fellow British subject, whom we hailed. He proved to be a most entertaining rascal, who, after losing a leg and an arm in a blood feud in his native land, abandoned his village and settled far from strife, secure in the charity of his fellow Moslems. He had been given the horse he was riding and was on his way to the famous shrine of Tuyok in the Turfan district. Two visits to this holy place were worth one to Mecca—he said. He moved more quickly than we did and soon disappeared.

We were glad, after several days of disagreeable travel, to reach Toksun, the first place of any size and with a fair bazaar. It possessed some buildings of the Amir, Yaqub Beg, Bedaulat, who ruled Chinese Turkestan as an independent sovereign during the

third quarter of last century. The mosque and school built by him were worth seeing, but the rest of this city was ruined and abandoned, for it has always been the fixed Chinese policy to destroy or ignore any remembrance of the usurper. The effect has been to keep alive the memory of the Amir, since every ruin is now ascribed to him.

At Toksun we saw that uninspiring sight, a Chinese army on the march. It is said that in China the lowest and most dishonoured of all professions is that of arms. Certainly, if the mob we met were representatives of the Chinese Army, the national opinion of the art of war would be accounted for. The true explanation probably was that any army was good enough for dealing with the Sart, and that it was waste of material to engage and pay an efficient force. A small but well-trained body of men would be the remedy in western eyes, but then Central Asia is not the West and numbers are better than efficiency. The news of an army of five thousand men is far more alarming than the advent of a couple of hundred well-equipped soldiers. For one reason, the multitude eats more than the elect, and causes far more annoyance. It is a mistake to set the clock to Western European time when the end of the Middle Ages has not yet struck.

We always thought of the road from Kucha to Toksun as a very dull one—hot in summer, cold in winter. Flies and dust-storms and drought were usual at the one season; frost-bite and polar blasts at the other. The traveller was incommoded whichever season he chose.

The barren mountains, high but strangely insignificant, stretched endlessly along the road. We saw some herds of gazelles, but they were so wild that it was impossible to approach within two miles, and the open plains with their quivering mirages gave a poor chance. There were very few wild sheep in the hills as the grazing was poor, and the Kalmuck hunters were too relentless to make a stalk worth while.

This fag-end of the Tien Shan is a dull region. Its valleys hold a fair amount of grass, bush, and even forest; the winter snowfall is considerable, but until more attractive regions are filled up this part of Sinkiang will be neglected. It is not, however, uninhabitable, though not worth habitation as matters are to-day.

CHAPTER V

TURFAN

At Toksun we interrupted our journey to Urumchi, and we did so through sheer cowardice. We knew that the remaining stretch was famous for its blizzards and bitter cold, and in true Turki fashion we deliberately put off the evil day. Besides, we had an excellent excuse to save our faces which might have otherwise been grievously blackened. That excuse was Turfan, the curious district that lies below the level of the sea, and which, only thirty miles from Toksun, away to the east, was well worth seeing. The Turfan depression is one of the few parts of Central Asia which has been often visited and explored, for it presents many features of interest.

Ethnographically it is an isolated Sart colony and the only homogeneous settled area outside the Tarim basin, and we greatly appreciated this fact. The true traveller puts his personal comfort and his men's before everything else—a scandalous remark no doubt, but an eminently practical one, for without some degree of comfort the lives and health of the party are affected. Here, in the Turfan area, we found a Turki population, and we got good accommodation for man and beast. If we wanted to move out anywhere, it was easily done since extra transport

could be obtained. Prices were reasonable, supplies were good, and the more we travelled in the north, the more we appreciated Turfan.

It is all very well for the European traveller to be keen and enterprising, but his followers think more of material comfort than of unknown routes or of unmapped mountains. All travellers know this, but few remember it ; and it is forgetting this simple fact that causes many of the difficulties of travel.

It was a dry march from Toksun to Turfan and, even in winter, the dust was trying. In some places the plain was swampy, but generally the great dryness of Turfan was evident.

Daulat had gone on ahead. With his customary resource he had taken comfortable quarters for us at the house of Abdul Qadir, once a well-to-do merchant but now, thanks to the habit of smoking the intoxicant hashish as well as to incompetence and extravagance, almost bankrupt. His house happily remained, and we found ourselves very well accommodated. The place was furnished with the usual Russian rubbish that disfigures the bazaars of Central Asia—let me hasten to remark that it is no worse than German or English trash—clocks, gramophones, cameras, vases, ink-pots, pictures, lamps—all broken and all dusty—crowding the rooms. It was a sad litter and a useless one.

Abdul Qadir was well-informed and most attentive. He spoke good Chinese as well as Russian and Persian, but unless he was under the influence of hashish he was quite useless. On one occasion he was interpreting for me when suddenly he stopped

like a clock run down, and the proceedings terminated abruptly. When he had another pipeful he quite recovered.

The Turfan oasis is highly interesting. Its lowest level is some hundreds of feet below the sea; consequently the heat in summer is very severe. The crops are therefore early and usually good; the grapes are famous, and the sultanas of the district are exported everywhere. The drying-houses for the grapes are a curious feature of the towns. Even melons are dried, the result being not unlike nougat.

So great is the heat that underground rooms are used by the people, who are most ingenious in their use of dried mud, which is employed artistically and not merely fantastically, in many different ways. The great drawback is the lack of water. There is never really enough water for the growing needs of the place, and as the snowfall is light and there is little rain, the demands of irrigation are unsatisfied. The 'karez' or underground system of wells, joined below the surface to form a continuous flow of water, has been introduced from Persia and works well. The labour is enormous, and the wells require constant care as they get full of sand, and the job of clearing them out is laborious and dangerous. In cold weather the water in these karezes is relatively warm so that when a well is uncovered, a mist rises up, giving the illusion of a row of smoking hot springs.

The aspect of the country struck me as rather more depressing than that of inhabited areas in the south. Trees were scarce; all cultivation was strictly utilitarian; and the only grazing was in the neigh-

bourhood of the Aidin Kol, a broad shallow lagoon into which the depression drains, and which is about 900 feet below sea-level. The mountains hold little snow in winter and so the summer floods are always scanty. There had been a fall of snow during our first visit (January, 1928), but we were told that this was most unusual. The people of Turfan work hard; agriculture is not the easy pastime that it is in Southern Turkestan, but to compensate there is a ready market for all Turfan produce, and much is exported to Urumchi, and during the vintage the Russians there buy grapes by the donkey-load for wine. They talk of 'pressing one donkey' or 'two donkeys,' as the case may be, to indicate how much wine has been made. The long, well-stocked and well-kept bazaar of Turfan pleased us very much, and the provisions were good. Rice was dear, which made the Kashmiris very depressed, and they always moaned when they could not get it.

There were two sights at Turfan. One was the Mosque, with a fine minaret, built by a Wang or Chief of Lukchen, to the east of the city; and the other was the ruined city five miles away on the Urumchi road. There, in a high bluff of loess, lay the ruins, an imposing vista of yellow walls with a temple of Buddha rising in the middle. All the images were broken—a pathetic sight—and the stones that had destroyed the serene face of the holy one still lay in the niches by the side of the shattered countenance.

After staying a few days, in considerable comfort, we left for a short trip to see the district. The cold was not severe, but we suffered chiefly from shortage

of fuel—a very scarce article in the depression. So when we found, on reaching our journey's end, that Ali Khan had left the small stoves behind, we were very angry, and Daulat had to go back to Turfan for them. Our first halt was at Qara Khoja, where there were extensive ruins and the interesting mausolea of the Wangs of Lukchen. European archæologists had removed practically everything worth taking from Turfan, and, though it jars on one to see the empty shrines, a little reflection shows their wisdom since, owing to the fanaticism of the Mohammedan, every statue had been broken and every fresco defaced wherever this was possible. In some cases it was clear that where excavations had been made but the objects found had not warranted removal, they had been promptly spoilt by the Mohammedans. Chinese indifference and Turki iconoclasm would have combined to do great harm to these relics of the past, so it is just as well that they have gone to Berlin.

The tombs of the Lukchen chiefs were attractive. The walls and domes were adorned with conventional flowers in red and blue, black and brown arabesques, and with texts from the Koran in Kufic characters. The tall spires on the top were very like a Siamese wat or temple.

Eight miles from Qara Khoja lay the famous pilgrimage place of Tuyok where the shrine of Assa-Ul-Kat, or the 'Big Staff,' enjoys great repute, and, as I have already said, two visits to it are said to equal a journey to Mecca. The shrine itself was an insignificant wooden building with a dome

of blue-green tiles, well situated at the mouth of a narrow gorge with a fine stream.

A great miracle does indeed take place here. It is customary for a metal vessel of water to be put in the shrine, and the faithful to withdraw. After a decent interval of prayer and expectation the sacred chamber is entered and the vessel is found empty, the water having passed through the metal, and the ground is damp. Tuyok is celebrated for its grapes and sultanas, and the energies of the people are divided between looting pilgrims and tending their vines.

Our host was a well-known harpy, an old gentleman of ninety-two, sharp as a hawk and vociferous by day and by night, in season and out, in his demands for money. Yet we liked Tuyok in spite of our host and his charges. It was a picturesque place and quite interesting with its numerous houses for drying the grapes. At this season all the vines were buried under earth to prevent damage from frost. There were really two parts of the town—the upper part, a bevy of brown houses clustering round the shrine, and the lower part given over to the grapes. The sultanas are small, sweet, stoneless and green, and very good indeed. They cost about twopence a pound.

We should have liked to stay longer, but the demands on our purses were too much for our piety and our patience; so we fled.

Our road from Tuyok led over barren sai through which in the haze we could see the great square mud pile that was the Wang of Lukchen's palace. The

more we saw of the Turfan area, the more we realised what artists in mud were its inhabitants. The mosques, graves and gateways were eloquent of the possibilities of modelling in mud, and here in front of us was a Cubist building as outrageous as the most daring modern architect dare plan.

We stayed a night at Lukchen and found it a dirty place, but although we perambulated the streets and hung about the palace, we did not get a glimpse of the young Wang. His tale was a sad one! His fate was cruel! For an enemy had served him up a dish of dogs' brains, and the poor youth, after eating this delicacy all unwittingly, had fallen ill. His brain became addled and he lived an aimless existence, harmless but useless, in his great pyramid of a palace.

A ridge of red sandstone, ineptly called the 'Fire Mountain' by the Chinese—a name which has led confiding travellers to search for volcanoes in Turfan—runs through the oasis. On leaving Lukchen we passed through a narrow, picturesque gorge with a stream and then burst into a wide valley of willows. The red sides of the Fire Mountain were gashed with black seams of coal, but there was not a trace of vegetation on them and the contrast between the barren hillsides and the willows and fields below, struck us forcibly.

The country was more developed now, and we passed by rows of magnificent old willows, venerable and stately as oaks. There were stretches of greyish reed, marsh and barren wastes, and fields and houses all muddled up; and across the road were the great gaps of some broken karez into which the whole

caravan might have tumbled. The people were busy digging up the old, long-dead reed, and preparing the desired land for the plough. This reed was often used for fuel, and was most unsatisfactory.

Near Murtukh we visited the gorge, which is filled with Buddhist caves, adorned with frescoes and statues ; and the site resembled that in which the caves of Ajanta in India are found. In both cases there were excavations high above the river-bed, and it was not easy to visit the secluded dwellings. The damage done to the pictures was lamentable, for the face of the Buddha had been slashed across or scarred and the few remaining statues almost destroyed. We went away, again thankful that European archæologists had saved something from the fanatical Turkis.

After crossing a particularly dreary piece of desert, we re-entered the city of Turfan. We skirted its walls and saw the moat filled with gruesome piles of dead dogs frozen stiff, and we put up once again at Abdul Qadir's house. They all welcomed us, for our arrival meant full rations for them and they lived in a very hand-to-mouth fashion. We were sorry for the children, but nothing could be done for our host, who was too much addicted to the hashish-pipe to be cured or helped.

CHAPTER VI

URUMCHI

After two days' rest for the ponies we left Turfan with very real regret, which would have been greater if we had known the discomforts before us. We often used to grumble at and abuse the Turki for his tiresome habits, but his towns provide comfort for man and beast, and we only appreciated the good points of the Sart—which may be described as an innate love of well-being—when it was too late. It is really remarkable that of all the many races of Central Asia the Sart (despite his follies and his faults) is the only one with a practical, common-sense outlook on how to live ; and this, in spite of the fact that other Central Asiatics as a whole generally like their comfort, the Sart alone has managed to secure it.

We left Turfan for Urumchi on February 12th, 1928. It was a perfect spring day and, innocents as we were, we imagined that the spring was at hand. We issued out of the long bazaar of the Turki city escorted by the entire population, and passed through the pleasant fields and orchards and across the stream. The sun was warm, the air balmy, and we felt the twinkle of the spring. We soon reached the barren, stony plain, the most dreary and desolate assuredly in a land where desolation and dreariness are the rule.

The plain glistened as though smeared with some monstrous slime, and then glided away to lose itself gradually in a light haze, above which rose the repellent stark mountains. No wonder, we thought, water was scarce, for there was little snow on those bleak, black slopes, and no friendly glacier to nourish constantly the leaking springs.

Of course we had started late and we did not get far, but put up in a Tungan school by the favour of the priest. These Tungans or Chinese Mohammedans were numerous in this part of the province. They come in for much abuse and are undoubtedly unpopular, but, as I have said, we found them always most courteous and helpful and real friends in need.

The weather next day was fine, and we proceeded across the plain, rising gently as we approached the hills. Suddenly we turned a corner of a harmless valley, and at once a wind, strong and bitter, straight from the Pole, swept down upon us. With one pace we had stepped from spring into the depths of winter. The wind blew harder and harder ; we were nearly frozen, and scuttled along to where, in a shallow hollow, was a large hovel. We burst into it and squatted down for the night. The large paper windows were stuffed up, smoky fires of wet dung and wood were kindled, and, protected from the wind, we passed a tolerable night.

The accommodation was limited and all day long other travellers, two-legged and four-legged, came to the serai until it was crammed to bursting. All night the wind howled but by morning it was possible to start, and so we set forth. There is rarely anything

to eat for man or beast in these places ; what there is costs much, so the traveller seldom stops longer than he can help.

We wound along the low hills, gradually rising. The scenery was dreary, and it was always as cold as death, yet the Turkis seemed not to feel it. We met one, sitting sideways on a donkey reading the Koran, and we asked him the reason for his unorthodox piety. He had none, but was a cheerful soul. Just after that we passed another donkey with two large panniers, both filled with small children hanging over the sides like puppies.

The pass that lėd into the north of the province, to Zungaria, proved easy enough for us, though the last fifty yards were difficult for the heavy arabas or carts which, with several teams harnessed to one cart, groaned and rocked as they were forced up to the top. The horses all steamed in the cold air. The descent was easy, and we passed the night in real comfort at a pleasant Turki inn.

Zungaria, the land that lies north of the Tien Shan, possesses a Siberian climate. The sky was wan, a typical northern blue ; the snow deep ; the wind cold ; the whole landscape was dull and raw. We passed long lakes on the way, and an interesting stone monument, which had been taken to Urumchi and had returned of its own accord to its proper resting-place.

The inns were surprisingly filthy. One village we stayed in had huge serais full of dung, stinking like a manure heap, dark as a cellar ; and we had perforce to stay therein. People sometimes express a

wonder why one does not pitch a tent on such occasions. The answer is that it is a choice of evils, and that unquestionably a tent in a Zungarian winter is far worse than any hovel. The ground was frozen hard, yet damp with insinuating little springs; the wind, the fuel, the cooking, the horses, and other considerations all made camping quite impossible. The European in an eider-down bag on a bed can tolerate a tent, but for the servants it would be a vastly different matter. Moreover, the discomfort of the serai is much less to them. After all, the flies are dead; the bugs, the lice, the fleas and the mosquitoes are in their winter sleep; the ordure is frozen like a rock, and so the balance is all in favour of a house. We did, however, feel that the weather conditions justified a robuster form of architecture.

Staying in these inns added much amusement to the journey. Daulat, a most accomplished victualling-agent and billeting-officer, rode on well in advance, usually with Ali Khan, to ensure the stabling being good. The result was a battle of wits between Daulat and the caravan serai-keeper, who tried hard to give the worst and scantiest accommodation. Daulat invariably won, unless there was some virago in charge, too vixenish even for him, who tore his beard and spat on him, for they were often quite unladylike. The Sart is a bully, a bluffer, a coward, and the possessor of an inferiority complex, so of course, Daulat always worsted him.

We were not sorry at last to see the capital before us and the end of these discomforts. Urumchi or Hung Miao Tsu, the Red Temple—also known as

Tihwa or Auspicious Change—is the capital of Sinkiang. Although a modern creation, like the province itself, it is a very important town. We found it a singularly uninviting one; the filth was frozen when we arrived but a thaw set in later, and the result was indescribable. The streets revealed themselves as made of black, viscous mud that stank abominably; when dried, it was made into bricks. It was deep and cloying, and horses which fell were sometimes stifled in the muck before they could be dragged out. Pedestrians walked gingerly on narrow paths, and there was a squabble every few yards when they tried to pass each other. It was naturally unwise to be polite and step off the path, since no one could tell if he were stepping into a foot or a fathom of muddy putrescence.

Everywhere was black, stenching mud. Dirt, and more dirt, was on all sides. There were grimy yamens half-tumbling down, and the whole town presented a striking aspect of grisly squalor. Even the Kashmiris, with recollections of their own middens and muck-heaps, were dumb with horror at this superabundant noisomeness. Fortunately for Turkestan there is no other town like Urumchi, but certainly one is more than enough.

We were met by Mr. John McLorn, the Postal Commissioner, and the kindness that we received from him and his wife I can never forget.

We drove through the long street, known as the Russian Factory or Concession, with nondescript houses of a semi-European type, and passed the Russian Consulate with its now disused church, and the large but ugly Tartar mosque. This was the Russian

quarter, full of refugees from Soviet Russia. We next passed through the Sart Bazaar before we reached the Chinese city proper, but there was little to distinguish one part from another in the all-pervading dirt and dinginess.

Despite the lack of attractions we had a pleasant time in Urumchi. My first call was on the Governor, Yang, the outstanding personage in Central Asia. He received me kindly and was consistently courteous to me, though no friend of the foreigner. There was no reason why he should be. With slender resources and solely by his own genius he had given peace and prosperity for sixteen years to China, and his murder later in 1928, was a grievous injury to law and order in Central Asia.

The hospitality of the people of Urumchi was amazing. My stay there was one long meal, and as every meal was large and filling, the effect of attending two or three in one day was somewhat congestive. It was quite in order to dine at noon, at four and seven, and then retire in peevish torpor and considerable discomfort, wondering if the pleasures of gastronomy were not much overrated.

Urumchi was always full of rumours, which is natural enough in any large Eastern city but especially where the absence of newspapers and the rigours of the censorship stimulate the wits and tongues of men. From all over Asia people had come to Urumchi, and the political conditions in Russia, and to a lesser degree in Mongolia and Persia, had turned a drab and remote Chinese provincial town into a political centre of some importance. The Soviet Consul was

the predominant factor in the town. I was not able to meet him, as I had enough on my hands without further complications.

There were three British missionaries at Urumchi who lived in a dismal side-street, but who were kind, contented and hospitable. Messrs. Hunter, Ridley and Mather were devoted men, and the Chinese Inland Mission was lucky to possess such members. Dr. Hunter, in particular, was a man of great erudition. He had not been home for twenty-five years and expressed no desire to go ; and I am not sure he was not right. Outside the walled town was the Catholic church, in charge of Father Hilbrenner, who later accompanied me to Outer Mongolia.

There were no sights in Urumchi. To the west of the town was a river which seemed to have no name, since it was always in vain that I asked anyone who might know. On a bluff, on the right bank, was the Red Temple from which the city took its name. Adjoining was a kind of park with a forbidding black clay statue of the Governor.

Fifty years ago Urumchi was a collection of isolated villages inhabited by different races. Now all these units have overflowed and there is one mongrel town—just a haphazard capital that serves its purpose.

There were, unfortunately, three great drawbacks to the town, namely, the bad water supply, a complete lack of drainage, and a climate severe even for Zungaria. Its site on the whole is good, as it is athwart all routes to the east or west, so that it taps the traffic and controls the country.

But Urumchi was not a nice place, and all my men were frantic to be off, but it is far easier to enter a Chinese town than to leave it, and it was a long business getting our permits to go.

At last we did so, and on February 28th, 1928, we started, and I said farewell to Mr. and Mrs. McLorn.

CHAPTER VII

HAMI OR KUMUL

OUR destination was the Khanate or principality of Kumul, known to the Chinese as Hami, and lying far to the east on the confines of the province, just where the snowy heights of the mountains merge into the drab monotony of the Gobi, or desert, of Mongolia. The road was a frequented one. Kumul was now, after the collapse of Khiva and Bokhara, the last independent Khanate of Central Asia, and the opportunity of visiting it was one not to be missed.

At Urumchi it had at any rate been possible to keep warm, for coal cost little, so now we felt the cold and shivered as we crossed a snow-covered, desolate plain in a storm of rain and wet snow with the miserable track awash under hidden treasures of black mud. The dogs were quite alarming to look at. They seemed dyed a rich sable, and smelt abominably. However, we did reach our destination that night, which was more than the wheeled traffic did. We constantly passed carts hopelessly stuck in the clinging ooze.

On one occasion we all had to get off and lend a hand to rescue a large farm-cart so completely bogged in the mud that the horses were in danger of suffocation. Not only did we save the horses

but we got the cart out as well; and the Chinese drivers should have been grateful, but probably were not.

Day after day we ploughed on, cold, bored and thoroughly disgusted. The inns were uniformly disgraceful—unsuitable even for a dissolute pig. Yet, all the same, our bowels yearned after them, and whenever stiff and frozen we caught sight of a building looking half like an old byre and half like an overturned boat, we carolled with joy. As Abdulla sententiously observed: 'When a man is hungry, he will eat poison; when he is full, he will turn from pilau.' With the insects all cowed by the cold, the dirt and dung hidden by the snow, and the kindly night screening the rubbish and dulling the filthy walls, the inns of Zungaria were tolerable on these freezing nights, and frequently even luxurious to our warped taste. We certainly could not have camped in the open.

The road to Kumul ran along the foot of the northern slopes of the mountain, and the views were often fine. There was only one important town on the way, Guchen, where we had difficulty in finding accommodation, but a kindly Tungan put us up and nearly asphyxiated me with a brazier of sulphurous coal.

Here a Bajaori from India came to see me. He was a cheerful and stout-hearted fellow who with his mule and his merchandise had just come back from a trading venture in Central China. He had sublime confidence in himself and heartily despised all others. His methods of business were to take

gold from Urumchi, which he sold for silver in Kansu. He then went farther on into China and bought silk in far Szechuan with the silver and sold it on his return to Turkestan. He gave gloomy accounts of the wretchedness and misery of parts of China, thanks to famine, pestilence and war, and said it cost him a silver tael a day to feed his mule. He always travelled alone, as he found the servants he had taken quite untrustworthy; and nothing had happened to him throughout the long journey. He loudly praised the British Consul at Chengtu who, to quote his words, 'had treated him with honour and distinction.'

As we proceeded eastward, we were much harassed by heavy falls of snow, and the country became boring and monotonous, and everywhere we saw large abandoned villages in ruins, all dating from the various Tungan rebellions.

We constantly crossed low hills and small valleys, and finally passed through the Tien Shan by a gorge to emerge once more in the typical stony desert of southern Turkestan. We left on the north of the mountains a Siberian countryside, cold but fertile, amply provided with water, and with the trees usual to colder regions, and we descended to desert conditions, scanty water and a dreary flora, which characterise the province as far as its southern frontier. Despite the melancholy aridity of the country we had now entered, conditions were noticeably less raw and harsh than in Zungaria.

Our road, however, was not a whit more interesting. We wandered on over the dark sloping barren plains

with the dry naked range on the left, and nowhere a sign of life. The inns were worse than ever; water and wood were scanty, and there was neither pasture nor population.

At one inn we found a dead dog and a dead camel at the door, and in a small depression close by, a coffin with a corpse in it. But things improved as we went on. Grass and water appeared; and then the first scattered villages of the Hami or Kumul district. We had once again reached a Chanto or Turki area, and were duly thankful.

At Togucha was a large graveyard with the imposing mud tombs of Sultan Abdul Malik and Sultan Ismail, both of Constantinople. We were rather mystified as to how these worthies got here, but I knew better than to press for details from the proud custodians.

At length, on March 17th, we reached Hami and put up at a most comfortable Tungan inn. The weather was warm; there was spring in the air, and the aspect of the country was pleasing. We all felt happier; washed, ate and slept, and forgot all the nastiness of the dirty road and dirtier towns.

The small State of Kumul, more usually known by its Chinese name, Hami, survives in a somewhat reduced form, but it is still a political entity though its future as such is threatened. Its Khan, or Prince, Maqsud Shah, was an old man when we visited the place, and he died in 1930.

Hami suffers from its position, for it is the last (or first) settlement on the road across the Gobi to China proper. It is now dowered with a garrison

of Chinese braves and has acquired a political-military importance which has robbed it of its peace of mind and turned it into a nervous, restless town, anxious for its future.

In 1931 it was the scene of some fighting. As the town can hardly feed itself, still less the passing traffic or the garrison, prices tend to rise, and when we were there it was very expensive. The Chinese have an exaggerated idea of the importance of the place, but its resources are far too limited for its possession to be really valuable.

There are three towns of Hami—the Chinese walled town with a garrison; a large mongrel town with a bazaar; and the old original city of Kumul with the palace of the Khan, its narrow streets, its strange mud mosques, and an agreeable, untainted bygone aspect.

I called on the Khan who received me courteously. He was a handsome man in the sixties, with a long, white beard and a fair, even European, complexion. He spoke Turki with a strong Chinese accent, was dressed in Chinese style, and clearly was more Chinese than Turki. Nevertheless, he was a strictly orthodox Mohammedan and he refused to be photographed. He was keeping the fast so that entertainments were forbidden, and he apologised for not asking me to dinner. We exchanged presents and he was generally very helpful, though a little nervous not nnaturally of the Chinese, who regard every visitor to Hami as a suspect. It was for this reason that we had a wrangle with the military commander, who was uncivil—and quite unnecessarily so. A traveller often

meets with disagreeableness from officials in China for no fault whatever of his own, since some Chinese are inclined to act first and think afterwards, although the well-trained official is very deliberate and circumspect in all he does.

The weather at Hami was warm, and ended up with a terrific dust-storm which cleared the air and enabled the snowy peaks at the eastern end of the Tien Shan to be seen. The sights of Hami were soon exhausted, and as there was some political tension in the air, it was not a place to stay in, although the climate was spring-like and our quarters were good. The fact was that we were clearly *de trop*. As we had a long journey before us to Outer Mongolia, we felt we had better clear out, and chose a route over the Barkul Mountains to the north, which would later rejoin the original road we had taken from Urumchi and so bring us back once more to that dreary place.

We left Hami on March 25th, and thanks to the admirable arrangements of the Khan, I travelled very comfortably. We were put up at good Chanto houses and the Kumuliks were most friendly. On the fifth day we left the main road, turned north towards the hills, and reached Qoilik Utun, a small settlement with a Beg, about midday. The weather had been bright and warm, but as we turned the corner of the valley near the house we were met by a blast that cut us to the quick and made us rush at our best speed to the Beg's house.

We stayed there three days, as the Fast of Ramazan was at hand and my followers wished to celebrate it.

and I must say we certainly had a most amusing time. At this season it was the custom for the Turkis to visit each other and drink tea and eat macaroni at each house. The well-to-do provide pilau as well. We followed suit, but, alas, we were not endowed with Chanto stomachs, and after a few houses had been entered none of us could eat any more! Not so, the Chanto. Our companions were ever ready to eat. I do not say that, after calling at several houses, they wolfed down the provender with the same unabashed greed that the Fast and a natural gift for guzzling had at first engendered in them, but they certainly did manage to stow away the victuals.

The morning passed in feeding and the afternoon in sports, of which wrestling was the favourite. For this, each man tied his loin-cloth round his left thigh, seized his opponent's waist with his left hand and his loin-cloth with his right and, thus engaged, began the contest. It was not particularly interesting, so we introduced a little novelty into the proceedings in the forms of the Three-legged Race and the Sack Race, which met with an enthusiastic reception as astonishing to us as it would have been to the long-departed inventors of those venerable pastimes. The Long Jump and High Jump were also demonstrated to the Turki, who tried them and liked them, but had to be shown a dozen times what jumping meant.

In the evening, after Chanto music and song, Abdulla and Daulat dressed up as an old man and an old woman and gave a very good little display of that evergreen comedy, 'The man who beats his

wife.' The Sarts were enthralled; they had never seen anything like it before, and thoroughly enjoyed the pungent dialogue which was in Turki. Even the Kashmiris sang a long dirge-like ditty straight through their noses and accompanied it on a drum.

So successful were we as entertainers of the populace that we were asked out next day to a neighbouring village. Off we started, as bright, gay and glittering a band as ever went on a jollification. The whole of our hamlet turned out with their best clothes, saddles and horses. There was a lady with a green silk skirt sprigged with purple flowers; an old dame in a gorgeous gown of yellow brocade, trimmed with fur, and with a gold embroidered stomacher; and some damsels wore silk skirts of the variegated hues of Andijan, while other matrons wore blue and purple. Red bodices with head-dresses of red tablecloths were particularly affected. The men peacocked no less than the women. One man had a complete suit of green billiard-cloth; another one of blue velvet, and all had a pretty taste in waistbands.

The children were there in abundance. Some were tied to their mothers like papooses; others were lashed by ropes round their wrists to their mothers in front; some were on their parents' laps; whilst the older children rode two or three on a horse. It was a perfect day with a rippling breeze; and it was a brave sight, as these dazzlingly-dressed folk ambled, and jigged and clattered along in colour like a rainbow trailing over the brown desert.

We spent the afternoon eating macaroni, pilau

and stew; drinking tea and watching the horse-racing. We ourselves returned in good time, but most of the Turkis did not come back till past midnight, and many made a night of it.

On March 28th we set forth to cross the Barkul Mountains and reach the town. It proved to be much farther than we had imagined, but we had perfect weather. Central Asia is ever the land of sudden and striking contrasts. The southern slopes of the Barkul Mountains showed us an arid and unpromising exterior, but we had no sooner entered them than we found a very different world. We wound up a narrow tree-blocked ravine and reached delightful Alpine scenery, and then plunged into the snow at the top of the Tuga or Camel Pass.

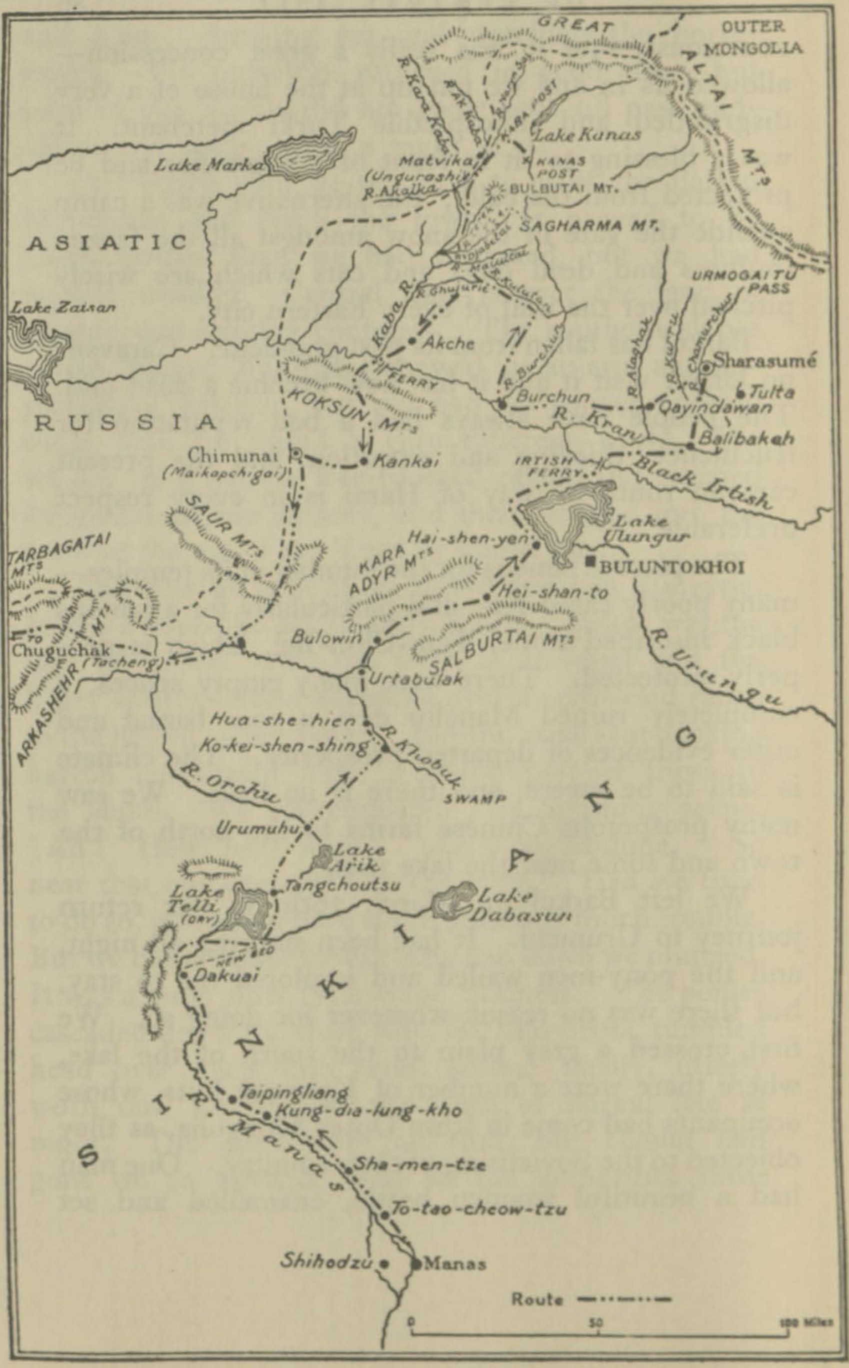
And now we once again looked down on Zungaria. It was a fairy-like day in early spring. Below was the lake of Barkul, with the town to the east and the hoary spruce forests sweeping over a snow-clad range to the brown valley below. Beyond were sour-looking barren corrugated hills, a counterpart of those to the south. We contemplated this ravishing scene. 'Ah! How near it is!' observed Abdulla. 'So near that one can spit into the town.' Had we tried to do so, we should have saved ourselves much trouble. But we did not dare to wait long and down we plunged. It was a long, slow, wearisome business. The ponies cascaded down the steep side, fell into drifts, tumbled head over heels into small holes; finally, utterly worn out, we reached the walls of Barkul late at night. The gates were all shut, but Daulat had gone on in advance, and so the authorities most

courteously—for it was really a great concession—allowed us in and we put up at the house of a very disgruntled and inhospitable Turki merchant. It was a blessing to sit in front of a warm fire and be protected from the cold ; the alternative was a camp outside the gate in the snow amongst all the frozen foulness and dead dogs and cats which are wisely pitched over the wall of every Eastern city.

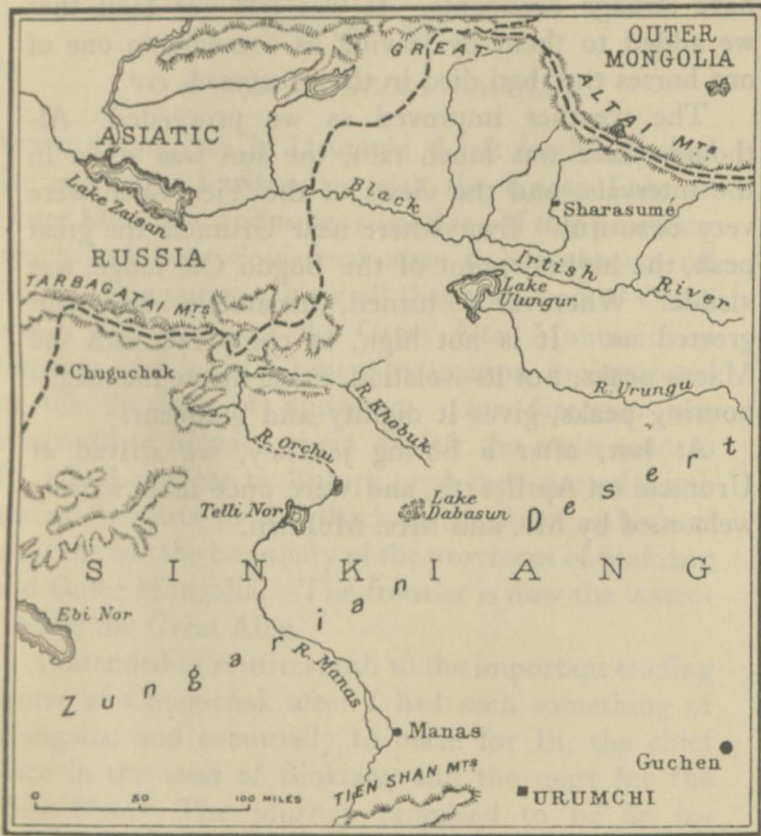
Barkul has fallen from its past grandeur. Caravans no longer visit it and it has now become a dead end. The people have always had a bad reputation for truculence, thieving and extortion, and the present caravan route by way of Hami is in every respect preferable.

The place is famous for the number of its temples—many poorly cared-for—and particularly for a famous black inscribed stone, Tzin-Chin-Bei, which is properly protected. There were many empty spaces, a completely ruined Manchu city, a poor bazaar and other evidences of departed prosperity. The climate is said to be severe, and there is no fruit. We saw many prosperous Chinese farms to the north of the town and some near the lake itself.

We left Barkul on March 30th on our return journey to Urumchi. It had been snowing all night, and the pony-men wailed and implored me to stay, but there was no reason whatever for doing so. We first crossed a grey plain to the south of the lake, where there were a number of Kalmuck huts, whose occupants had come in from Outer Mongolia, as they objected to the Sovietising of their country. One man had a beautiful wooden bottle, enamelled and set


GREAT ALTAI MTS
OUTER MONGOLIA
R. Kara Kaba
R. Ak Kaba
KABA POST
Lake Kanas
Lake Marka
Matvika
(Ungurashi)
R. Akalka
KANAS POST
BULBUTAI MT.
SAGHARMA MT.
ASIATIC
RUSSIA
Lake Zaisan
Kaba R.
Akche
FERRY
KOKSUN MTS
URMOGAITU PASS
R. Alaghak
R. Kurtu
Sharasumé
Tulta
R. Burchun
Burchun
Qayindawan
R. Kran
Balibakah
IRTISH FERRY
Black Irtish
Chimunai
(Maikapchigai)
Kankai
SAUR MTS
TARBAGATAI MTS
KARA ADYR MTS
Hai-shen-yen
Lake Ulungur
BULUNTOKHOI
Hei-shan-to
Bulowin
SALBURTAI MTS
TO Chuguchak
(Tacheng)
ARKASHEHR MTS
Urtabulak
R. Urungu
Hua-she-hien
Ko-kei-shen-shing
R. Khobuk
SWAMP
R. Orchu
Urumuhu
Lake Arik
Tangchoutsu
Lake Telli (DRY)
NEW RD
Lake Dabasun
Dakuai
SINKIANG
Taipingliang
Kung-dia-lung-kho
R. Manas
Sha-men-tze
To-tao-cheow-tzu
Shihodzu
Manas
Route
0
50
100 Miles

with silver, but he refused to part with it, alleging that it was not his but given him as a security—the usual excuse when the owner does not wish to sell. The journey then became a dull one, through mon-



otonous unpopulated country, all awash under the thawing snow. The inns were even more unspeakable than usual on this unfrequented road, and I was much amused at finding in my room in one squalid hovel many pairs of old, useless but clearly much-

treasured shoes ; some bundles of tobacco ; a terrible old pair of trousers ; a wicker jar, and a basket of miscellaneous trash—the whole of this deeply grimed in dust, a strange medley for a bedroom. These inns have strange occupants. It was not our fault that we added to them by leaving as a memento one of our horses that had died in the courtyard.

The weather improved as we proceeded. Although there was much rain, the sun was warm in the intervals, and the views of the Tien Shan were very beautiful. Everywhere near Urumchi the great peak, the highest point of the Bogdo Ola range, was visible. Wherever we turned, this stately white giant greeted us. It is not high, as compared with the Manas peaks, but its isolation, rising above the neighbouring peaks, gives it dignity and grandeur.

At last, after a boring journey, we arrived at Urumchi on April 11th, and were once more warmly welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. McLorn.

CHAPTER VIII

TO OUTER MONGOLIA—MANAS

After a long stay in Urumchi, I left for Manas and the north, for I wished to visit the Kanas Lake in Outer Mongolia, and to see something of that province, which had been Sovietised after it had thrown off Chinese suzerainty. Now all that remained to China was a strip south of the Great Altai Mountains, a remnant of a great Chinese possession incorporated in the Province of Sinkiang. Our direction was westward to Manas, where we left the main road to Ili, and I suppose to Europe, and then turned north across Zungaria to the Black Irtish River, which at one time was the boundary of the provinces of Sinkiang and Outer Mongolia. The frontier is now the watershed of the Great Altai.

I intended to return south to the important trading centre of Chuguchak after I had seen something of Mongolia, and eventually to make for Ili, the chief place in the west of Sinkiang and the mart for the Tien Shan. The journey promised to be an interesting one, and I was fortunate in having the Rev. George Hilbrenner of the Catholic Mission at Urumchi as my companion as far as Chuguchak.

The journey was a long one. It presents no difficulty if the season of the year is carefully chosen.

During the winter the cold is intense on the blizzard-swept plains of Zungaria, where shelter and fuel are rare and there is nothing to guide the traveller. Nevertheless, the admirable Chinese Postal Service works regularly and expeditiously all the year round.

During the summer there is some trouble over the water in the rivers, but the real danger lies in the horse-flies. These flies are not unlike wasps. They have prominent green eyes and settle on animals in thousands, and it is not at all uncommon for horses to die of loss of blood. Men, too, are attacked, and with the ticks, mosquitoes, and other horrors, as well as the great heat on the shadeless plain, it is unwise to travel between June and September.

We journeyed to Manas over the rolling plain that lies at the foot of the Tien Shan. Spring had really come, and it was pleasant amongst the trees and growing crops with numerous farmyards scattered everywhere. Large though the population was, there was ample room for more. On all sides were the ruined villages, the relics of the Tungan rebellions, which have played havoc with the prosperity and peaceful settlement of Zungaria. There is a large Tungan element near Urumchi, which causes the Chinese authorities much anxiety. We used to meet many of these Chinese Mohammedans on the road. With their black wideawake hats, long black coats and waistcoats, goatee beards and austere aspect, they looked like Dissenting ministers. As I have already said we got on well with the Tungans, who have in their disposition something firm and solid such as is seldom found in other Central Asiatic

communities. But there is no question of their intense unpopularity amongst other races.

Manas proved a dull place, relieved only by the Catholic Mission and the kind Dutchman in charge. It rained incessantly, and we did not get away till April 20th. Besides the rain at Manas, I remember an interminable dinner at the yamen, which began at mid-day and ended at 8 p.m. As, however, I gave way in the middle of it, my sufferings were less than those of the two missionaries who were my fellow-guests.

Father Hilbrenner and I were glad to get off and start for the north. But first we followed the Manas River, a great stream winding below high cliffs and leaving in its wake immense swamps and backwaters alive with geese and ducks, and holding, too, many pigs and deer. Behind us were the great peaks of Manas, the highest summits of the Tien Shan, wholly in Chinese territory. Away to the east was the Bogdo Mountain. We were fortunate in the weather, and we appreciated our luck, as Zungaria is a wet country. It was monotonous enough, and the only relief was found in the views over the river, where the fresh green tints make a charming scene.

We had with us, on leaving Urumchi, a new dog given to us by Mr. G. W. Hunter. He was Tihwa Ram—a large white Mongol dog, an excellent watch-dog, obedient, faithful and courageous. He was with us for two journeys, and a better dog or better gift I have never had. He did not get on at all with Terek and Kainchi, the other dogs, who resented his arrival, and although Tihwa was not at all

quarrelsome, the others would listen to no proposals of peace.

After passing the large Telli Nor, the lake into which the Manas drained, we stopped for three days at Urumuhu or the Red River, where my companion had some of his flock. The place was a wide valley through which the river, now in spate, flowed. The trees were abundant, and the light fresh emerald leaves of the wild poplars made a band of cheerful colours against the desert beyond as we looked over the oasis from a high bluff. Away to the east was the Arik Nor, which receives the waters of the river. In Central Asia most rivers end in a lake and are seldom so fortunate as to reach their true bourn, the sea.

The country now improved and we entered hills with good pasture and many flocks. In one bleak lonely valley an enterprising Chinaman had opened the Inn of Heavenly Fortune, which was rather forbidding in appearance and which we had not the courage to patronise. To the west of the road we saw the uninteresting Qara Adyr Range, which, though fertile enough, has not quite enough rain to make the vegetation abundant.

For a day we skirted the Ulungur Lake, a fine sheet of water, a little brackish but drinkable. The play of colour on the lake was fascinating. The general tint was a bright pea-green, but as the clouds chased each other in the heavens, the lake was dyed violet, or greenish-blue, or at times even indigo. We saw geese, duck, and a few swans on the calm surface of the lake, but we failed to catch any fish,

if indeed there were any. At last we left the lake, crossed a barren range of hills, and descended to the Black Irtish River, suitably so named. The snow had by now begun to melt and the whole country was flooded. We were surprised at the size of the river. Black and sullen, it swept along in great volume—the only river of Sinkiang that reaches the sea—and we felt that we were in Siberia as we watched the Irtish on its way to the Arctic Ocean.

We were ferried across on a huge raft, comfortably and safely, but when we reached the Kran River, a tributary of the Irtish (and also in flood), matters were not so easy. There were two Kalmuck ferrymen with two very primitive dug-out canoes, lashed together with telegraph wire, and in these we crossed in fear and trembling. It was a long business, entailing many journeys, as the donkeys had to be taken on board and huddled into the bottom of the boat, which held very little. The dogs howled mournfully, and Terek particularly objected, but all managed to get across safely, although the horses had to swim.

The capital of the Altai is Sharasumé or Chengwa-tsu. We arrived there on May 18th and were charmed with the place. It was a typical Alpine site with three streams brawling through it, the mountains behind and the pleasant high hill in front. The weather was perfect, clear, crisp and sunny. We had comfortable quarters with a very hospitable Sart, whose kindness made up for the frigidness of the Chinese authorities, who were too much influenced by the presence of a Soviet Consul to be friendly

to capitalist strangers. It was natural enough. After all, we were only birds of passage.

The capital of the Altai has declined in importance since the Soviet occupation of Outer Mongolia. The brisk trade with Kobdo was quite dead and no one was allowed to cross the frontier. The town depended chiefly on the influx of miners who come to wash for gold during the summer months, and it had an air of impermanence customary in mining towns.

The bazaar was well-stocked, but the prices were high and foodstuffs were very dear, as the district produced next to nothing and supplies had to be transported from Manas. The Soviet Consulate occupied a mean house in one of the streets, and it was difficult to believe that there was any need of a consular officer.

The chief interest of this part of the Altai lies in the presence of the Kirei Kasaks, the lordly Kirei as they have been called. Certainly, of all the nomads we met, they were the most attractive. Their behaviour, manners and appearance were markedly superior to those of other nomads, whether Mongol or Mohammedan, and yet they remained true nomads and did not degenerate into a race of town-haunting horse-copers, as many Kasaks in the Ili valley have become.

Although the Great Altai Mountains figure prominently on the map, they proved to be less impressive than we had expected. The valleys and forests were delightful and the flowers fascinating, but the range requires one high peak to dominate and give dignity

to it. They suffer, too, by comparison with the Tien Shan and the Himalayas, and the traveller feels disappointed. We looked in vain for the soaring summits and mighty glaciers to which we had been accustomed.

Our destination was the Burchun and Kaba valleys, a triangle wedged in between Mongolian and Russian territory, which includes the Kanas Lake.

We left Sharasumé on May 23rd, a perfect day with not a cloud in the sky and the scenery standing out like an etching. Our route was over the lower spurs and foothills of the Altai with the Irtish River away on our left to the south. It was pleasant if rather tame country, of a marked Siberian type, which, considering that we were close to Siberia proper, was not surprising.

We passed several stones, monoliths of Kalmuck deities, much weather-worn, and also a small salt lake. We found that the Burchun was a surprisingly large river, rapidly rising, and rivalling in size the Irtish itself. In old days steamers from Russia used to come as far as the junction of the two rivers. The large house of the Russian manager was now used as a yamen—and a sorry place it looked. There was also a street of Russian houses, much decayed, all deep in heavy sand. The place is famous throughout the district for the size, number and voraciousness of its mosquitoes. Later we were to have an opportunity of testing the truth of the report.

There was a first-rate ferry over the Burchun River, which was effectively worked by a Kasak woman and a small boy. We crossed at once, as the

river was rapidly rising, and were dumped out into two feet of water on the right bank. We struggled along as best as we could, but it was not easy, as the water was out over the country, and the ponies disappeared completely into deep, unsuspected and well-filled ditches. The ferry, in fact, soon became unapproachable, and parties of Kirei Kasaks, stark naked and looking like centaurs, tried to reach the boat, as they had come down to buy supplies from the bazaar in Burchun.

After two days' delay we set out for the hills over a water-logged land, and very difficult business it was. We were now in the heart of the Kirei country and the steppe was alive with households moving to the uplands for the summer grazing. There was a steadiness of purpose amongst them that was striking. The pastures were all allotted so that there were no question of hurrying to get first choice. We saw many odd sights amongst the parties of nomads on their summer exodus. One woman had her cradle on her lap with a baby and a small black kid—a goat, not a child—inside, and she was well occupied, since she had her husband's rifle on her back and a rope with half a dozen camels tied to it in her hand.

The men always attended to the flocks, whilst the women looked after the laden animals. Small children took their share in the work and no one was idle.

We were hospitably entertained as we rode up the valleys by the various chiefs whose wealth was evident from their comfortable, well-found tents,

much superior to any of the Kirghiz, Kasaks or Kalmucks of the other parts of the province.

The Kirei struck me as being true nomads. They lived where no crops could be grown, and it was remarkable how seldom we found bread, and then only in small cubes, as hard and unpalatable as ivory dice. Tea, kumiss and dried milk were their staple food, with mutton when possible; but we never saw the delicious cream and curd of the Kirghiz, nor any signs of the bread and pastry which those nomads make.

The great standby of all these northern nomads was kumiss, or fermented mares' milk. My men lapped it up as though it were their mother's, but much as I liked it, it never agreed with me. This caused me constant sorrow, as on many a hot day when my men were swallowing kumiss by the gallon, I had to stand apart, a melancholy abstainer, and watch without sharing their greedy potations. It is a splendid drink, nourishing, refreshing and stimulating, and no nomad can remain for long without it. The mares used to be tethered near the tents ready for milking, and a pretty sight it was; they were never used for any work. The amount given by each at one time was very small, and they were milked five or six times a day.

The spring flowers were now appearing. There were blue and yellow iris, gorse in abundance, large magenta-coloured hellebore and all the commoner flowers. The farther we entered into the Altai, the more truly Alpine became the scenery. The Kaba River, the frontier between Russia and China, rushed

down the thickly wooded valley, into which ran small glens deep in grass, flowering shrubs and freshly burgeoning trees.

After some days and many meals in the tents of the kindly Kirei we reached the small Chinese post of Akkaba, with a courteous Tungan in charge, beautifully situated near the river. We crossed several spurs and at last reached our destination, the Kanas Lake. Everywhere the spruce and larch forests glided down the hill to broad prairies covered with violas, yellow, cream, blue and purple, strewing the ground with patches of colour. Cyclamens were abundant and the green turf was blue with the smaller gentian. There was also a large purple gentian besides many other Alpine flowers.

We passed one or two Uriankhai Mongols on our way up to the lake, but otherwise the pastures were empty, and man was wholly absent from its shores. The lake itself, with its clear-cut margins, grey rocks and wooded grassy shore, was more like a Scottish loch than a Central Asiatic lake. There was a sad lack of wild life in the Altai highlands. The sheep and stag had been killed off; there were, perhaps, a few harassed bear and ibex; the sable was extinct. Yet to look at, the country should have held some game, but the toll of the rifle had proved too much. There were, too, a few wolves to prey upon the flocks.

Our stay in the Altai was rather curtailed for want of food. We managed to get some flour from the kind Tungan officer, who refused to accept any payment, although it was worth its weight in silver.

We were sorry to leave the Altai, which may best

be described as pretty. The pleasant people, the spring weather, the flowers, grass, trees, all made us long to stay, but the approaching hot season, as well as a shortage of rations, obliged us to turn south before the desert became insupportable and the journey hazardous.

On our way down to the Irtish a young Kirei shepherd rode up to us, a pleasing picturesque figure in his long coat of purple velvet, with his gun on his shoulder and his staff in his hand. While he was talking to Abdulla Beg I took out my camera to photograph him, but he at once galloped away, left his sheep, loaded his gun, and prepared to sell his life dearly. We had the greatest difficulty in persuading him that we were harmless strangers. He declared that the Russians used to shoot his folk out of hand and he was going to take no risks.

On our way down we came to a new township, Arche, a raw, unkempt place, where there was a pleasant young Chinaman installed as Amban, and the only one I ever met who had a good word to say for the Kasaks, for, as a rule, all Chinese officials hate the nomads—above all the Kasaks—and I think with reason. The Government was trying to colonise the plains by the river and a good deal of ground was under the plough. The difficulties were the remoteness of the place and a very long trying winter with heavy snow. It seemed doubtful whether the enterprise would succeed, but it was highly desirable to make the Altai independent of the south for its supplies.

As we went down the Kaba valley to the Irtish

our progress was slow and difficult. The floods impeded us terribly, and the unfortunate donkeys were always disappearing out of sight and having to be rescued from watery graves. The horses also were constantly being bogged or drenched and we ourselves fared little better. We were a very moist party when we reached the river.

The Irtish was indeed a stately river as it rolled slowly along swollen with flood water and reinforced by its considerable tributaries, but it took a wearisome time to cross, and we spent two days over the business, during which large mosquitoes swarmed over us and made sleep out of the question. The horses were attacked by equally obnoxious horse-flies, and it seemed to us an endless wait as pestered by insects we watched the small row-boat crossing the river; the horses had to be lashed to the gunwale and swum across, and naturally they objected. Although we were worn out with want of sleep we could not halt and were glad to move on and get away from the pests.

Our destination was Chimunai, a small Chinese town on the frontier; from there we intended to go south to Kulja (Ili). The country was very thinly populated and we hardly met any travellers; this often made us uncertain of the way, although generally our Kasak guides were reliable. We found the town of Chimunai boasted a small but well-stocked bazaar and we were able to buy what we needed. The river Lasta, a mere trickle, flowed through the town and formed a frontier with Russia, but there were little signs of life on the Russian side, and only a fort, a

few huts, and a collection of apparently deserted aouls or nomads' tents.

The track to the south to the important town of Chuguchak skirted the frontier and crossed first the barren slopes of the Qara Adyr Range and then the Saur Mountains. These ranges were not particularly interesting, inhabited by nondescript nomads, a few settlers and various wanderers; and the country seemed rather disturbed, probably due to the nearness of Russia. Although we left on June 12th the weather turned cold and foggy. We passed through good pastures on rather open hillsides, but the water was scanty, and it was only farther south that forests and true Alpine scenery were met with. Of the latter, however, there was little, and we next crossed a broad plain with dull hills, and on the whole found it a featureless tract of country. Our escort amused us by opening volleys at what we thought were bandits and what they thought were wolves; but we were both wrong as it was only a marmot.

We continued to find the weather bitterly cold, and were glad to find a house to stay in at the Khobuk River, where the chief of the local Torgut Mongols lived. He had several large white tents, but he slept so late that we had gone before he had risen. We exchanged many compliments but did not see him.

We had now one range of mountains to cross before reaching Chuguchak. We found it easy enough to traverse and the road and water remarkably good, and the vegetation consequently marvellous. Indeed the Arkashahr Mountains surpassed in flowers

and pastures anything we ever saw in Central Asia, and we were astonished at Nature's prodigality. The grass was so high that a mounted man was hidden, and the meadows swept down the hillside like a forest. Tall purple columbines with white centres covered the hills. White and yellow roses were in profusion. Ranunculus, honeysuckle, potentillas, geums, primulas, larkspurs, and four kinds of iris were growing everywhere. On the curiously flat tops of these down-like mountains the gentians painted the sward with blue, and as we gazed on the valleys below we saw that they were golden and white with ranunculus, while the roses shone in the sun like snow.

To the passing native—Kasak, Kalmuck or Kashmiri—it was all just grass, but the men of Hunza were more appreciative and openly admired these entrancing prairies. We finally descended into the Emil plain leaving these joys behind, and found the rest of the road very hot and trying to Chuguchak, where we arrived on June 21st, 1928.

CHAPTER IX

CHUGUCHAK AND ILI

EVERY town in Chinese Central Asia has more than one name, and Chuguchak boasted three, being known also as Tacheng or Tarbagatai (Marmot Mountain). It is probably the most important commercial town in the province; most of the merchandise from Russia enters by it and it lies close to the frontier—sometimes inconveniently so—as inroads take place which the authorities cannot deal with.

There were a number of pretentious buildings in the town, noticeably a large red hall like a Dissenting chapel, which turned out to be one of the chief mosques. There were many warehouses, and shops of the Central Asiatic pattern, all doors, windows and dust; also a Soviet Consulate. We ourselves camped in the grounds of a fine house rapidly falling to pieces. The tall iron stoves were rusted, the glass panes of the double windows were broken, the roof had crumbled in and thousands of pigeons whirred through the empty rooms. No one knew the why or the wherefore of all this desolation; and no one cared, although glass and stones and timber were all valuable.

The Chinese quarter of the town was walled, but

the large business quarter lay outside, and all day and all night camel caravans with their tolling bells passed through, bearing their misshapen loads of hides or wool or neat bales of cotton. In the large sheds women were picking over the cotton and wool, sorting them into heaps.

Chuguchak has an almost wholly Sart population of immigrants from Kashgaria, and presents a clean and definitely Russian appearance. The bazaar was well-stocked but prices were high. Foodstuffs were scarce, but the great problem was fuel, and this problem was insoluble. In the winter the cold is always intense, yet there is neither wood nor coal, and millet stalks provided the only firing. There was little to do at Chuguchak, and after resting the horses and collecting a few supplies, we had to continue our journey. I felt that I had better start as soon as I could, as I had a long distance to go. It is remarkable that although Central Asia is a leisurely land, and time a mere figure of speech, there is always a hurry to be off. Perhaps the reason for this paradox is that it is quite impossible to catch up the days that have been lost. A caravan can only go at a certain rate of speed, and can thus never make up time.

From Chuguchak there were two roads, one direct to Manas, the other due south across the Barlik Mountains to Kulja. Father Hilbrenner had to hurry back to his parish, and so I had to travel alone on my way over the hills to the south, much regretting the loss of a delightful companion.

The officials had been very courteous and had

sent a first-rate man with me. Once more we set off over the Emil plain, crossing the river by a frame-bridge, which looked very out of place as it rose like a gallows in the midst of the grass. Here we found quantities of whitebait, and fished so successfully by the simple method of dropping a basket into the stream that we forgot the merciless mosquitoes and enjoyed an excellent meal.

The water was very cold and one of the dogs, Kainchi, had cramp. I rubbed him hard for several hours, helped by one of the Kashmiris, and the dog recovered but was very weak for several days after.

We soon entered the mountains which were quite pretty, with pleasant enough copses and little glens but the scenery was not striking. They are called Barlik, or the Mountains of Plenty, to describe the abundance found there; and indeed, except for wild animals, there was plenty of everything—plenty of magnificent grass, plenty of sheep, plenty of timber and of water. The butterflies, too, were beautiful and the country swarmed with large fritillaries. So we wandered rather aimlessly over the smooth down-like hillsides, meeting many bullocks dragging timber for building to Chuguchak, and finally arrived at the camp of Khizr Beg, chief of the western Kirei.

We found our host a pleasant man, stout, hospitable, and much married. He was enjoying the companionship of his seventh wife, who was one of three living with him. He had divorced three and death had removed the odd one. Khizr lived in great comfort with fine tents, gear and equipment;

he possessed a thousand horses, ten thousand sheep and strings of mares, who with their foals were tied up outside his tents for kumiss. That delectable drink flowed like water, and the old guide from the yamen sat down and drank fifteen cups straight on end.

Our host had some attractive possessions, and I noticed a large kumiss bowl of wood with silver fittings. The dark polished wood and chaste silver contrasted well, and there was a fine silver-mounted ladle to match. There was also a kumiss mixer with a handle like a silver mace. The mares' milk to be fermented is put into a large skin and stirred with a paddle. This one was of an unusually elaborate design.

The Beg was well educated. He wrote and read Kasak (Turki) and could speak and write some Chinese and Mongolian as well. He dressed in the nondescript Russian fashion—shapeless trousers and a short coat, which ensures the minimum of dignity. He even spoke Russian and enjoyed a wide jurisdiction. He offered me many presents, from horses to his kumiss bowl, but I refused to accept any and would only take a sheep for my men. We had a very agreeable visit which, if time had allowed, I should have prolonged, but, as mentioned before, there never is any time in Central Asia ; distances there are so great that when once you have got anywhere it is time to go back.

Rich though the Barlik Mountains were, both in name and fact, the next range of hills known as Maili, or Fat Mountains, was even more valuable

as pasture. There was little to differentiate the two ranges, but the Maili has sparse timber and much less water and consisted rather of many purely grassy valleys, often shallow, full of close nutritious grazing. The result was seen in the flocks and the amount of milk produced, and we realised that the name was well given.

Every one was very nice and kind and we were suitably entertained. I was once deprived of my second cup of tea in one tent, because, when I handed my cup to my host, the economical but grubby attendant drained with his own lips the few dregs left, and then filled the cup and gave it to me. Hardened though I was rapidly becoming to simpler conventions, I felt disinclined to drink my second cup. But it was not wasted. It was in the same tent that when the buxom lady of the house produced some bread, and she noticed that some crumbs had fallen on the floor—and not a clean floor either—she scooped them up, and the servants ate them. Bread was rare—and economy a laudable virtue.

We were sorry to leave the Kirei, really kind folk and without their equals in Central Asia, but the low, rolling hills were endless and their country grew stale. Day after day since we had left the Altai the road had switchbacked over these green dumplings of mountains with their fat flocks, scanty trees, and bee-hive tents tucked away in any suitable corner. I often found it hard not to envy these nomads their free life; their ability to move house where and when they wished, unhampered by thoughts of ploughing or sowing or any anxieties about the weather.

It may not be an intellectual life, or a cultured one, or a life of energy and uplift, but it was something better—a healthy, useful life, and the only life suited to, or indeed possible on, these pastures.

Just after passing some greater bustard we left the hills and crossed the plain and found ourselves by the notorious lake, Ebi Nor, at the mouth of an opening in the hills known as the Zungarian Gates. There have been many tales of the winds and tempests of this region, but we found it distinctly tame. It was a still night with a full moon, and we camped on a bare plain with a little brushwood, a few miles from the lake which, quite unrippled, twinkled in the moonlight.

After passing through a district inhabited by some unspeakable Kalmucks, we reached the small bazaar of Borotala, a new settlement of Sarts, on July 4th. Here the whole population flocked to see me, demanding medicine. There is nothing more desired in Central Asia than medical treatment—especially when it is free—but I resolutely refused to doctor the local sick, as there were hospitals and treatment was available at Kulja. My supplies were primarily for my own men, and they would soon have been exhausted if I had attended to all who wanted treatment. The people all complained of the bitter cold in winter, and naturally enough, for there is never so great a snowfall or such low temperature in Kashgaria as is experienced here, and they were not accustomed to so rigorous a climate.

Both in the Altai and here the hares were numerous, and the dogs had a grand time. Tihwa distinguished

himself by catching three, and, at times, I saw as many as twenty at one time within a small area. Leaving Borotala, I went up the Urta Saryk valley and much admired its beauty, but the expedition was not a success. There were thunderstorms with heavy rain every day; the river was extremely difficult to ford; the ponies were worn out; and Ali Khan, the caravan-bashi, went sick and disappeared. Still we had a pleasant week although we did curse the weather, and we enjoyed the flowers which were superb, especially the large white gentians.

On July 18th we reached the Sairam Nor, a fine lake with wooded hills in the north and good pastures at the west. So many Central Asiatic lakes are more interesting than beautiful, but this one was not so, for it was a lovely sight. It was a deep azure and was unruffled by the slightest breeze; it lay in a circle of rugged mountains still capped with snow, on which hung thick belts of billowy cloud with a clear sky beyond.

The Charkhar Mongols, a superior race, live here, and their Amban came to see me. He was very civil and brought the usual presents, including some of the dry skin of hot milk, which looked like very thin yellow wafer and was quite good to eat. He kept on impressing on me how much the Charkhars esteemed this. The old Mongol enjoyed the cake I gave him, and bit large half-circles out of each slice, handing the rest to his attendants, who ate with gusto. The Amban was duly photographed, but an attempt to do the same with a venerable Kalmuck, who came picturesqucly along riding a cow, did not succeed.

The old gentleman was frightened, and rode off in a huff, cursing violently; and so did we at having missed so amusing a photograph.

On July 22nd we reached Kulja in rather a dilapidated condition.

CHAPTER X

THROUGH THE TIEN SHAN

We camped in the Roshan Bagh, a pleasant garden with ample shade and water but alive with mosquitoes. It was also the resort of the townsfolk, who gave lunch-parties and musical evenings, and who flocked out to inspect us.

Ili or Kulja, also known as Ning-wan, was at one time the most important town in the province, but of late had rather fallen from its high place. It is still, however, a great trading centre, and lying so close to Russia it enjoys a considerable export and import business. The population is mixed, not to say mongrel, and we noticed many refugees from Soviet territory. We saw for the first time the new Chinese flag, which adorned the bazaar in thousands, and we rejoiced at the sight.

Ili is one of those places to which the traveller is compelled to return. There were various similar centres which we found we could not avoid, such as Aqsu and Khotan, though we would often have given a good deal to escape them. But they have been carefully situated and cannot be dodged. Our stay at Ili was assisted by the kindness of Father Hufnagel, the Superior of the Catholic Mission. The Taotai, too, was most courteous and came out to call on me—

an attention which I appreciated and which helped me in my dealings with the officials.

The Ili district presents a rather unkempt, unsettled appearance as a consequence of the political unrest that has afflicted it. The Tungan rebellion, the Russian occupation, and the mixed races, have tended to make life there uncertain and impermanent. The agriculturists as well as the traders are nearly all immigrants of recent date, and they have a habit of talking of returning to their birth-places. They never do, but this disposition provides a pretext for not planting trees or building decent houses or developing their land. Thus everywhere the fields are poorly looked after, and the lack of orchards is particularly noticeable. The older settlers describe themselves as Taranchis. The name is said to be derived from the Mongol word 'Taran,' meaning corn or barley, which was provided free by the Chinese to encourage settlers. Another meaning is given as 'cultivation,' derived from the Turki, but whatever the origin is, it is a general term for the Mohammedan cultivators of the Ili district. There are other farmers in the valley—and they are a very mixed lot, too. There are two septs of Manchus, many Chinese and Tungans, large settlements of Russians and a sprinkling of Afghans, Bokhariots, and even British Indians.

The soil of the district is admirable and the climate good, if rather cold. Probably there are better prospects for denser settlement here than in most parts of the province. Ili is situated in the midst of the Tien Shan, or Heavenly Mountains,

as the Chinese who never visit them picturesquely call them. Russian travellers have explored this mountain system to a certain extent, but otherwise it has been rather ignored, which is not surprising when the remoteness and the strangely inclement climate, with its perpetual storms, are considered. My intention was to see as much as I could of these splendid mountains, for the season is short and the distances great.

We left Ili on July 31st, intending to travel up the Kash valley to its head, and to reach Urumchi by the pass that led down on Manas. This would take us through the heart of the Tien Shan and promised to be interesting. No one, of course, had ever heard of such a route, and we were told, till we were sick of hearing it, that the main road ran on the north of the Tien Shan, and that no sane—or insane—person would dream of going by any other. The prospect of toiling along a dismal high road with an abundance of sand and vermin and a scarcity of water, when the mountains offered an alternative route, was hateful; so we trusted to the map, which was useless, and to our luck, which proved good. Leaving the Roshan Bagh with its mosquitoes and Paul Prys, we went east up the broad Ili valley, with the brawling, swollen, yellow Ili River on our right.

At a large shrine, called simply Mazar (shrine), we left the main valley just where the Kash River flows through a fine gorge into the main stream. A little farther on we passed our last village—a typically nondescript one with a mob of a dozen

races all living together. This mixture of blood does not tend to progress or to order in an agricultural community, and quarrels, even murders, are not uncommon.

A few miles beyond the village we passed the winter quarters of the Zungur Lamas, with its large monastery and temple, cloisters, and the usual appurtenances of Lamaistic or Tibetan Buddhism. The next day we came to their summer camp on a broad level plain near the river. They were polite, although we committed the solecism of riding into the enclosure. The spectacle which this camp monastery offered was highly impressive. On the grassy meadow were sixty-four large white aouls, placed in a circle with the shrine and place of worship in the centre. The fane itself was a tent, but distinguished by a blue and yellow roof with a golden spire; the place of worship was an immense open marquee adjoining it. The prior, dressed lightly in a gold-brocaded vest, with bare arms (the heat was great), received me courteously. I was much struck by the furnishing of his tent. The fine embroidered silk hangings, the cushions, the vessels of silver and brass, and the gilded carved wood and elaborate altar, were all good; what was still more remarkable, they were all beautifully clean.

The prior himself was a striking man with an intellectual face and with no sign of the typical Mongolian cast of features. His manners were admirable, and intelligence radiated from him. He had been twice to Lhasa and asked many questions, but felt himself unable to answer any that I asked

him. The abbot was a man of very different type, with rat-tail moustaches and huge horn goggles. Conversation languished, and I fear our visit bored him.

The monastery offered a gay and lively scene when the trumpets blew, and the red-robed lamas, with yellow cloaks over their shoulders, issued from their tents and assembled for worship in their marquee. Just beyond the monastery we crossed the river Kash by a ferry at a point where it was narrow and the current swift, and the river roared down between its confined banks. The ferry-boat was a large oblong box, unpleasantly like a coffin, and was tied to a horse's tail. Every one got in ; the box was pushed off, and the whole concern tore down-stream, gradually approaching the opposite bank. When near the far side the horse was lashed and made to pull the boat, which was thus drawn ashore. To regain the original starting-place the procedure was reversed, and the coffin on reaching the other side was towed up the bank till it was once again at the starting-place. It was a very slow business ; we had to halt for the day, but there was no help for it as the horses were swum across and you cannot load wet horses. The scenery now improved. The grass became good and forests of spruce appeared. We were still in Kalmuck country, and our Mongol guide was much perturbed at the scarcity of kumiss, so instead of attending to our wants he roamed all over the country, searching for tents where he might find his drink. Besides cadging from every wayfarer he met, he used to go the round of all the messes in camp,

eating voraciously. He would sit apart from the Mohammedans and gorge steadily. Fortunately we soon reached his boundary and he left us.

We found the Kasaks paying their taxes—of course in kind—to the Chinese officials, who usually take the horses for the provincial army. It was amusing to see the Kasaks going off with some spavined or knock-kneed brute which had been handed in as a tax and naturally refused.

As we advanced up the valley the scenery grew in beauty and allurement. But—and it was a great ' but '—the weather grew worse. I have travelled much in the Tien Shan, and in other mountains, but undoubtedly for steadily wet and wholly unreliable weather the Tien Shan stand alone. It is this that so greatly detracts from their charm. What is there to do during day after day of drenching rain and soaking mist, with rations getting lower and no chance of replacing them?

We saw much of the Kasaks, of the Kasai tribe, the largest in Sinkiang. They were pleasant people, famous horse-stealers and robbers, great men at horse-coping and lying, genial and utterly untrustworthy. They had not the intelligence or charm of the Kirei, but we got on well with them, though they are so unreliable as to be boring at times. They amused me by declaring that my small portable dark-room was a private aeroplane, and, as the news spread, numbers came to look at the marvel.

When we reached the hot spring at the head of the Kash valley, we were more than ever undecided as to the way. There was no one to ask; even if

there had been, the probability was we should have learnt nothing. It chanced, however, that we saw two marmot hunters coming down a side valley, and they said they had heard there was a path over a pass to the north, but naturally they had not been there themselves. So I took Daulat with me the next day and set out to explore. It turned out that there was a pass, and on August 15th we crossed over, left the Kash valley, and proceeded to grope our way north as best we could.

The desolation was complete; the scenery impressive; and, mercifully, we had a few days of fine weather. As we went down the valley we were stopped by high cliffs and had to turn aside. These blocks of impassable cliffs are a feature of the Tien Shan, and the traveller is constantly compelled to cross from one valley into the adjoining one, follow this till he is brought up by another wall of rock and then cross again into yet another neighbouring valley. He thus reaches his destination by a series of crab-like moves. In the winter, when the streams are low and frozen, it is often possible to get through these barriers of precipitous cliff by keeping to the bed of the stream.

We proceeded down the valley till further progress was stopped, then turned up another wide valley, where we were lucky enough to come across two Kasak shepherd-boys, who gave us some idea of the direction. We left this valley by a pass as steep as the side of a house. By taking the kit up in relays we managed to reach the other side, where we lost ourselves in crossing another pass, being caught in

heavy rain which lasted for three days. We found two more shepherds and hoped to find a comfortable hut—the possibility of stumbling on a nomad's aoul always spurred us on even though disappointment was the general rule—but we were disgusted to find that these hardy herdsmen spent the summer crouched under a ledge of rock.

We had taken the wrong path and were forced to return over a barbarous track but managed to get our animals along, thanks to the skill of Ali Khan. We were now growing seriously short of supplies and, as we did not know where we were, it was rather anxious work. However, after crossing a whole series of major passes and meeting hardly a soul, on August 28th we at last reached a small village near a monastery and found that the main road from Ili to Urumchi was only a long day's march to the north and that even Manas was but four days' journey away.

We were much relieved as we were exhausted by the difficulties of the track, but at all events we had done what we had set out to do. It is always one of the difficulties of the Tien Shan that the season is so short. Although it was only mid-August, the flocks were leaving the upper pastures, the leaves were turning brown, and a heavy storm of snow would have been really dangerous. The exploration of the higher valleys of the Tien Shan must therefore remain difficult, as the dilemmas the country offers are ineluctable. Late in the season the rivers are low, the snows are melted, and progress is possible, but the grass is then all eaten down, supplies of meat and milk are unobtainable, and there is the like-

lihood of being shut in by an early winter. And, of course, there is the perennial bad weather. I can only repeat that I have visited different parts of the Tien Shan at all times of the year, but I never had the good fortune to meet with consistently fine weather. Climatically, this mountain range seems to be a law unto itself.

We spent over a week at this monastery, and procured supplies from a village on the main road. The monks were tolerably civil, but as they made no advances to us we left them alone. We were all too irritable, hungry and tired to be bothered with Kalmucks. One or two monks, driven by curiosity, did call, and one proudly produced a hat bought in the Calcutta New Market, which he had recently visited on a trip to Lhasa.

Travelling via Manas, we reached Urumchi on September 15th, 1928.

CHAPTER XI

TO THE DRY MOUNTAINS AND KORLA

MANY political changes had taken place at Urumchi since we were last there. The Governor had been murdered, his prime minister executed, and a good deal of tension and unrest had ensued. The city was under martial law, and this was the cause of a scene at the main gate between the soldiers and my men. Abdulla and Daulat showed themselves masters of Chinese invective; this surprised me, though I might have realised that abuse is the first knowledge of a foreign tongue that is acquired. After mutual apologies the incident (by no means untoward) was forgotten.

We spent a very comfortable first night with Mr. and Mrs. McLorn, but there was not the same feasting and junketing in Urumchi society as there had been, as the uneasiness was considerable. Rumours of the most surprising kind filled the air, and no one quite knew what was likely to happen or who was friend or foe. Urumchi had no newspaper, no wireless and no means of obtaining news such as is possessed by modern cities, but the bazaar was alive with rumours and there was little that happened anywhere in Asia that was not promptly known.

The weather was fine but the state of the Urumchi

lanes showed how heavy the autumn rain had been, and the town looked as dirty and disreputable as it did during the thaw of spring. The season was getting late ; already there were sharp frosts at night, and it was manifestly time to leave. Therefore, on September 30th, we bade reluctant farewells to our kind host and hostess and to our hospitable friends. My intention had originally been to travel via Turfan to Lop Nor and so to Kashgar by the route along the northern slopes of the Kuen Lun. The Chinese authorities demurred, saying that the south of the province was not safe. I gave in rather reluctantly as the matter was not worth quarrelling over. In view of this set-back I had to make other plans, so I determined to see what I could of the country between Turfan and the Tarim River, which is the continuation of the Yarkand River, as well as that of most others that flow south and east to the depression which finally becomes Lop Nor. It was a curious district we were thus making for, and its chief feature was the Kuruk Tagh or Dry Mountains, an offshoot of the Tien Shan, but a misbegotten one. I had also heard from members of Dr. Sven Hedin's expedition, which I was fortunate in meeting in Urumchi, that there were changes in the rivers of the Tarim basin, and that long, dry channels were again flowing. So although I was very peevish over the frustration of my plans, I consoled myself with the thought that there was plenty more to see. It would mean turning north when we eventually reached the river and going to Korla and back along the high road by Aqsu.

We left Urumchi more easily than we had entered it, for we were buttressed up with every kind of permit and passport, but the town will always be associated in our minds with absurd incidents.

There was the case of old Kundan Das, the Hindu moneylender, who travelled alone throughout the country, miserably clad and half-starved yet with a heavy load of silver ingots. He fell ill and we had to doctor him. There was an excellent Russian doctor, Monsieur Pedaschenko, who attended the old Hindu. I paid the bill; the doctor provided medicine and attention; and Kundan Das ignored both, pouring all the medicine down the drain. He got well, however.

Then we lost four horses, mysteriously stolen out of the stable at night, although Ali Khan had been warned that there was danger. The hue and cry arose. After an interval the horses were brought round to me by the police, who had paid a large sum to some agent of the thieves to recover them. Next, one of Ali Khan's pony-boys robbed him of a considerable sum which was spent in living riotously in the bazaar. The boy subsequently enlisted as a soldier, but stole so much and so persistently that it was reported that he had finally been shot by the authorities. We later revisited Urumchi and I shall have to mention the town again.

Our route now led to Turfan through the same hills we had traversed in the winter, and we found the scenery quite as uninteresting except that the vegetation in the lower valley was pleasant enough. The wind was exceptionally violent and troublesome.



Qungur II from Kashgar

We put up once more at Abdul Qadir's house, and found Turfan rather hot. The country, however, looked attractive now that we saw it under crops, and the fruit was welcome. The vintage had begun and grapes were abundant, cheap and delicious, especially the white grape, very long and sweet, and seedless. The vegetables were plentiful, the bread good, but the melons rather disappointing; perhaps it was a little early for the best kind.

We appreciated the good things of Turfan, and compared the prices and quality favourably with the north, where everything was dear and inferior. Even at Manas, where fruit was cheap, we had found it most insipid—a melon, a peach and a grape all tasted alike, that is of nothing.

As our destination lay beyond the desolate Kuruk Tagh, which looked and sounded far worse than they proved, we had to arrange for a supply of water. Accordingly after endless squabbling, bargaining and loss of temper, we arranged for ten donkeys to accompany us, carrying wooden canisters, or flattened barrels, which leaked. Every one prophesied our speedy and inevitable death from the beginning, but we were obstinate, for we knew well the real meaning of Turki forebodings. The passion for the high road—the safe, dull, well-known high road—is deeply ingrained (and naturally enough) in every Central Asiatic, and joy, mixed with faint gleams of intelligence, always lit up the pony-men's faces whenever they heard, which was seldom, that they were to go by the main road. Ali Khan, however, viewed things differently. As long as he could feed

his horses, he preferred the lesser used and cheaper routes. To do him justice, he never once showed himself afraid of desert or mountain.

As we crossed the Turfan depression we saw many new karez—those curious underground water-channels introduced from Persia—and other evidences of the opening of new land. If a good water supply could be introduced, the possibilities of the Turfan oasis would be enormously increased. On our left, at the very pit of the depression, we saw the Aidin Kol, the salt lake which receives the drainage of all Turfan. It glistened as though frozen over as it lay in the sunlight. Near it was some good pasture with thousands of animals feeding.

The track rose gently and, looking back on the oasis, we saw the whole of the Turfan district unfurled before us, with the dark trees of the settlement standing out against the lighter desert soil. Behind them were the low, red Fire Mountains, and beyond, the snowy peaks of Bogdo Ola. It was a wonderful scene, as it embraced every feature of a Central Asiatic landscape in one compact panorama.

In the more southerly parts of the province many sheep are pastured, and as the nomads in the Tien Shan do not come down with their animals for market to the towns till early winter, large flocks of sheep are driven north from the southern areas for consumption at Urumchi. The poor beasts leave the Lop grazing grounds in July and August when the heat is severe. The way is long, barren, waterless, and often provides no grazing, so that the casualties during the journey in these torrid months are enormous. The

profit, however, is great, and is a set-off against the losses. As we wended our way along the track over the barren hills, the mummified bodies of sheep and goats lined the route, fallen in strange attitudes and twisted into strange shapes.

After a couple of days the country improved. At Arpishme Bulak we rested in an ocean of tamarisk under a burning sky by the side of shallow brackish wells. To acquire merit we each of us dug two wells, but the soil was sand, the water near the surface, and the degree of merit probably low.

Arpishme Bulak was in one of those valleys common enough in Central Asia, but always rather puzzling to the European. Water was abundant in one place, but elsewhere it was reported that there was none to be had—which was probably true. Yet there was an extensive area of reed, tamarisks, scrub and wild poplar, all indicating water; in fact the vegetation seemed disproportionate to the scanty supply. We had indeed to go a long way before we reached the next well. Of course, in Turkestan, no one has ever dug a really deep well, as wells are understood in India and Persia, for the Turki practice is to scratch a few short feet down. If water does not at once bubble up, the workman throws aside his primitive tools and declares that there is none. We often used to obtain water by improving wells which were dry or had been declared useless. Brackish water is the rule, not the exception, in Turkestan, and here the Kashmiris, with their habit of 'hedging,' annoyed me by saying that the water was 'sweetly brackish'—a most inept description.

The oasis of Singer proved to be the first inhabited place since we left Turfan. It was forty miles from Arpishme Bulak, but half-way there, under a sharp red peak of sandstone, a pious and clever old man had discovered a spring. At least he said so, and claimed the merit and the honour, but it was a very old spring and its discovery was hidden in bygone ages.

Singer consisted of two houses, a neglected orchard, abundant grazing and excellent water, and a few fields. Years ago Abdur Rahim lived here, a man well known to European travellers, but his brother Sinim proved too much for him. Sinim had a large, hungry, lazy family, and was himself endowed with a low bucolic cunning which he had unhappily transmitted to his descendants. No doubt thirteen children surviving and countless dead, with a mob of grandchildren, had soured a simple disposition, but we realised how wise Abdur Rahim had been to leave Singer and settle at Shindi, two marches off.

Sinim had left the peach and other trees to die, and seemed to revel in seeing neglect and mismanagement everywhere. The family collected no wood, ground no corn, gathered no grass, but scratched about every day for the day's needs. It was a curious side-light on the Turki character, for Singer could easily have been developed into a prosperous settlement.

We were now well in the Kuruk Tagh or Dry Mountains, and although water was scanty except at certain wells, I was surprised at the abundant

vegetation. The growth of the trees was very good; there was ample grass and brushwood; and it was easy to understand why the Mongols from the Qarashahr district make their winter quarters in these valleys. We made a détour to see something of the country, and our first impression was confirmed. The scarcity of water appeared due rather to geological effects than to actual shortage of supply, since at Hai Ta Shan and in other places the water was copious.

On October 19th we reached Shindi, to which Abdur Rahim had removed himself from Singer, and we at once realised his wisdom in doing so. The place was far superior to his old home—even without his brother. There was a pleasant flowing stream of good water, numerous trees, good fields, and a generally attractive neighbourhood. Abdur Rahim himself was civil and well-informed and a contrast to Sinim.

We were now about to reach a region where an interesting geographical change had recently occurred. Centuries ago, at the foot of the Kuruk Tagh, and past the town of Loulan, a river had flowed to the Lop Nor. Later it had changed its course, and the country near its old channel grew arid and was abandoned. Now, once again, the empty channel was filled; and the Tarim River, which collected the waters of nearly every stream south of the Tien Shan, was in consequence almost dry, thanks to this deflection of its waters to their original course. It was a most interesting phenomenon bound to affect local conditions by drying up pastures, destroying

fields and compelling the abandonment of settlements; producing, in fact, on this side of the Tarim River what, a millennium ago, it had brought about at Loulan. Actually the miracle was not so great as it sounds, for the soft sandy soil that formed the whole area watered by both rivers was easily influenced by floods and spates, and it was not difficult for a river to carve itself a new course in the yielding surface through which it ploughed. Indeed, in that strange region south and east of Kucha, where the great rivers of Kashgaria collect together, overflow and swamp the soft unresisting sand, the country is honeycombed with abandoned channels, half-full or rarely filled river-beds, lakes and lagoons drying and filling—a medley of riverine havoc so easily created by the unchecked, uncontrolled floods that roll down when the snow melts and continue till the peasant takes his toll and diminishes the volume.

We left Shindi with a new dog, a pleasant, useful animal, but one who could not get on with the others. Our dogs were very conservative, and Tihwa, the most peaceable of beasts, always resented the arrival of any new-comer. Dogs have a good deal of work with a caravan and reinforcements were needed, especially as we had had to leave Terek behind at Manas with the Catholic priest there. Terek was a splendid dog, but he fought Tihwa continuously in season and out. He also became an expert thief. He used to walk along the bakers' shops in a bazaar, quietly taking a roll from each, all unseen by the owners. Then he used to go round the camp at

night and was a great adept at stealing food even from underneath the men's heads, where it had been hidden in the vain hope that he might not find it. But he had many good points and we were sorry to part. He died nobly a year later a typically Turki death, fighting for food.

The way down to the plain was pleasant along the narrow, winding valley of the Shindi River, through a dense growth of wild rose and clematis, tamarisk, willow, oleaster and poplar (toghrak). The place abounded with wild pig, who came to view the camp with great unconcern. The Kalmucks have a passion for pig-meat, and on one occasion Daulat saw one riding with a lump of meat on his saddle-bow. He and Abdulla went up to negotiate for it, believing it was gazelle. There was terrible consternation and lamentation when, on touching it, they found it to be unlawful pork. Some of the blood got on Abdulla's coat, and the washing of hands and clothing which followed was almost unending.

At last we entered the plain at the foot of the hill, and there, in front of us, was the Yangi Darya (New River) once more in its old long-disused bed. The month was October, and the volume of water was decreasing, but even so this broad river was a fine sight as it rolled along, eroding the low, sandy banks. All day there was the noise of tons of sand falling into the stream. The river had forced its way past the dead forests of poplar, past the dead beds of reed, and past all the evidences of the havoc which its fickle departure a thousand years before had caused ; and now new reed was beginning to spring up, new

life was appearing in the neighbourhood of this returned wanderer.

It was impossible not to wonder, as one listened to the constant thud of the falling sand, saw the new vegetation rise and the dry bones of the century-old trees swept away, how long this treacherous stream would remain faithful to its regained channel. But the rivers of Turkestan are too capricious for prophecy.

The ruins of Loulan were now, thanks to the new swamps formed by the altered course of the river, cut off from the south. We were told that, even in winter, these swamps would not be frozen hard enough to enable them to be crossed, and that a long détour would be necessary if we wished to reach the site.

It was a slow business crossing the river as. a small leaky dug-out was the only ferry. From the other side we traversed a dreary desert with the gnarled and rotten branches of a dead toghrak forest for a part of the way, where some years ago there had been a postal runner's track, which was marked by poles thrust into mud pillars. These were refuges, too, from the fierce blinding sand-storms that are common.

After crossing the Konche River, an almost insignificant stream, we reached the important village of Tikkenlik on October 23rd. We were now in that vague amorphous district stretching from Korla in the north to Charkhlik in the south, which is known as Lop and extends east and west of that line for many scores of miles. The inhabitants were known as Lopliks, and we found them agreeable, friendly folk with a distinct dialect, and more unsophisticated than the Turki. The Lopliks are primarily herdsmen. On

either side of the rivers there was good, if coarse, grazing, chiefly reed, brushwood and toghrak. There was, however, considerable cultivation wherever possible, and normally life was not hard. But recently the defection of the water had caused the Lopliks much worry and even alarm, for it meant withered pastures and barren fields. They had petitioned the authorities but without avail, for the task was beyond the capacity of any Chinese Amban, whose brief twelve months of office enabled him only to carry on and not to originate any new work. The unfortunate Lopliks were almost desperate, and had made a feeble effort to dam the river and so to induce it to return to its former course, but the attempt was a sorry one and never showed signs of succeeding. The only hope lay in the action of some strong man ready to sweep away all the excuses, claims and rights (mostly imaginary) of interested parties. Strong men, unfortunately, are as rare in Turkestan as in Europe.

The state of the village of Tikkenlik was particularly serious, and in 1928 the families there had dwindled from five hundred to two hundred and twenty. We always remembered the place by an excellent melon we had there, unique even in a land of good melons.

The villagers, thanks to their flocks, were prosperous enough, even if they did have to import flour from Korla, but they could not continue indefinitely watching their dried-up fields while they consumed their cattle and wondered if the water was ever coming. They had a curious custom of never milking their cows from autumn to spring, and we suffered for

their unreasonableness. There were signs, too, of their Mongol pre-Islamic origin, which is common to many settlements in southern Sinkiang. The graves, for instance, were often marked by a tall pole with an ox's head balanced on the top. The funeral feast and the grave were thus both commemorated, but the pious Mohammedans of our party were scandalised by the sight of a forest of poles bristling with animals' heads, the skulls and horns looking sinister and certainly unorthodox.

From Tikkenlik we turned north along the Yarkand or Tarim River to join the main road at Korla. The scenery was rather attractive and the country appeared prosperous, the defection of the river not being felt in the upper districts. There was abundant marsh, and many small lagoons and pools amongst the dunes, all giving nourishment to fresh vegetation, a sequence of marsh, reed and toghrak. At one large village, Chong Kol (Big Lake), there were numbers of punts and the people visited their fields in them. The water was clear and full of fish, water-fowl were abundant and there seemed many wild pig.

By this time the weather was getting wintry and heavy rain and a good deal of snow fell so that the tents were often frozen stiff and thickly covered with hoar-frost. We met many Kalmucks on their way to Tibet, and very picturesque they looked with all their bright clothes and jingling horse-furniture. They were Charkhar Mongols from the Borotala, and had come a long way and had an even longer road before them, as they were going to the great

monastery at Kumbum. We came on these people just after crossing the Konche River ferry. It had taken our small party three hours to get across, and we wondered how the Kalmucks would fare with nearly a hundred camels, many horses, and much gear to be taken over. The ferrymen would assuredly earn their pay.

As we approached Korla we were surprised to see how addicted the people were to opium and hashish. At one town we picked up a yayeh who could not move without his early pipe of opium, which he smoked quite unabashed before his fellow Moslems. On one occasion he sat with his opium pipe in one corner of the room, whilst four other Sarts smoked hashish in another. The climate was undoubtedly unhealthy, being damp, feverish and enervating, and probably encouraged the men to take to drugs.

At last we reached Korla. We found it, to our dismay, full of soldiers, amongst whom we discovered the pony-boy who had stolen the money from Ali Khan at Urumchi. The latter was far too sensible to try and get any of it back, but he insisted on a document being signed and sealed, setting forth that the boy had left of his own accord and was owed nothing. Without this precious paper, his master might very easily, in the pleasant fashion of the Turkis, have been accused of murdering the boy, and would certainly have been blackmailed by the relatives.

CHAPTER XII

TO KUCHA, AQSU AND YARKAND

We had now to take to the main road, as there was no other route by which we could travel. As winter was at hand, the best plan seemed to make for Yarkand in the south, and thence go on to Khotan, the only important place we had not visited. It is always possible to move about during the Turkestan winter, provided one remains south of the Tien Shan amongst the settled Sart population, who like to live comfortably, much to the advantage of their self-invited guests. So we set our faces resolutely for the flesh-pots, making first for Aqsu and its genial hospitable governor, and thence due south, up the Yarkand River, to the town of Yarkand.

For some time therefore after leaving Korla we travelled along the main road, the great thoroughfare from Kashgar and Yarkand to the north. During the summer months traffic is light, as the journey is troublesome and agriculture occupies the attention of all. The track is unmade—usually unbridged—and suffers from floods, while much of it is covered by heavy sand. Yet during the winter months we found it amusing enough. We met heavy overladen wagons often drawn by five or more horses, which, when

occupied by Chinese travellers, were fitted rather like a gipsy's van, with stove pipes and windows.

A good deal of the road we had already travelled on our way to Urumchi, but we found we had missed several interesting places. Some miles from Korla is the village of Tim; as we passed it we noticed three sticks marking a grave, and so stumbled upon a curious story. A merchant on the way to Andijan with his wife lay down by the roadside to rest, and as he slept, a Kashgari came up, and knowing that the merchant's wife was famed for her beauty, he knocked the husband on the head and carried off the lady, whom he kept a prisoner. She managed to escape and brought the murderer to justice, and he was executed near the scene of the murder. The grave we saw was that of the unfortunate merchant from Andijan.

The Turki sometimes betrays a pretty wit. A day or two later we saw an immense stone that had been carefully dug out and laid conspicuously by the roadside. It turned out that a waggish Sart had spread the rumour that beneath the stone was buried treasure. As no one is so credulous as the Turki on that subject the whole countryside turned out and dug like beavers, but their only reward was the excavation of this rock and a large pit as a monument to their greedy credulity.

As we approached once more the shrine of Father Black Hair where we had duly bathed on our former visit, I told the Kashmiris that, as their hair was still grey, there must be something wrong and that it could not be the fault of so expert a miracle-monger

as Father Black Hair. They protested, but a little enquiry showed that I was right. The usual offering in Kashmir at a shrine of repute is one rupee, and the Kashmiris had fobbed off Father Black Hair with one anna—a manifest example of misguided economy! So we all bathed again and increased our offerings.

Although the autumn was now well advanced, it was interesting to notice how the trees varied at each village. In some the poplars were quite stripped and bare; in the next, they would be untouched by autumn. It all depends on the shelter from the wind, but once the frost came their leaves turned colour and fell. The tall poplars which are such a feature in Central Asia and other arid regions where irrigation is practised, were a welcome sight to the traveller in Turkestan, because they marked the site of houses and the end of a stage. The poplar is useful in such a country as Chinese Turkestan, where the varieties of trees are few. The height, too, makes the tree invaluable for houses; the wood is used for burning, poor though it is. Most of the furniture and woodwork of the country is of poplar—soft, unseasoned, always warping and cracking, but cheap and good enough, whilst the leaves are useful for the animals. The poplar, in fact, takes the place of the bamboo or coco-palm elsewhere; and, as it grows easily and quickly, it appeals to the Sart, who is careful to plant it everywhere.

Instead of going by Bugur, which entailed a detour, we took the track across country at the foot of the mountains direct to Kucha; and, on the way,

we met one of these quaint travellers who are always turning up in Asia.

After leaving the apricot trees and peach orchards we overtook on the desert a little, huddled-up old man riding a diminutive donkey. He held in his hand a mandoline about two feet longer than the donkey, and wore a white cap trimmed with faded purple fur, a sheepskin cape and mocassins. He made a strange, touching and plucky figure as he tittupped along on his little mount. He was going to Aqsu, earning his living as he went by playing on the long-necked instrument. He said he was ninety but was probably only seventy. He was a cheerful, pleasant old man, and impressed us all with his courage.

We found the villagers of Tarlak most inhospitable; but the people of the foothills are often churlish. It is true that later they saw the error of their ways—but that did no good. It is one of the disagreeable characteristics of the Turki that he is apt to yield only to fear or to greed.

It was not attractive country at the foothills of the Tien Shan, as on the southern slopes of that range there is little humidity, and the spurs tailed off into barren ridges. Their inner recesses, nevertheless, hold good grazing, and we saw spruce in places, but the outward appearance was sombre and uninviting. The same may be said of the whole of the range when viewed from the south. Although its rivers provide abundant water, the hot winds from the Takla Makan desert (that forms the heart of Chinese Turkestan) are too much for the reduced humidity of the southern slope of the mountains to cope with.

The eroded slopes, the scanty glaciers, the meagre snowfall, and that great ruthless sweep of stark desert that fringes the foothills, all point to a climate different from that of the north. Yet the orchards and gardens and spacious productive fields that extend along this southern side of the Tien Shan more than compensate for the grim outline of the mountains.

It is in this part of Turkestan that the eternal contrast of Central Asia is best seen, where rich cultivation, consisting of trees breaking down with nectarines and peaches, myriads of melons, and stretches of rice and wheat, adjoin a barren tract destitute of a trace of water.

It is these contrasts that make the fascination of the country. As we rode along, we looked up at the low bleached foothills with a darker and higher ridge behind. Beyond, we saw a tier of red sandstone heights, and finally there were the snow-powdered summits, gently blurred in the slight blue haze. And away on the plain we saw the tall poplars and broad blackish patch that marked the fertile district of Kucha.

We reached Kucha on November 11th and put up at the town house of a well-to-do Bai. The building was large and had several courtyards surrounded by well-built rooms fitted with stoves and glass windows. There were good outbuildings and stables, and it was a desirable property, to be sold for £350.

Kucha certainly looked brighter than it did in January. The bazaar was bursting with food—fruit, vegetables, meat, forage and fodder—all very cheap

and good. The Turki always turns his crops into cash as soon as he can, and the autumn is the time to buy.

Fröken Lovisa Engvall, the Swedish lady doctor, who has lived many years in Kucha, and has done much good work there, again entertained me most hospitably.

I made a short détour to the Alum Mines and Solfataras on the Kucha River where we found a small squalid village occupied by the workers, who produced good clear crystals by very primitive means, helped by surface coal mines close to the deposits.

Just behind, on the hills, the Solfataras smoked, giving a truly volcanic appearance to the scene. We visited several and found them very hot with deposits of sal-ammoniac beneath them.

The red sandstone cliffs nearby were fine, rising precipitously above the river, and glowing a rich red in the winter sun. For four miles the path led through these gorgeous abysses before it reached the Kucha River. We were shown high up in the face of the cliff some orifices that looked from below like the dark mouths of caves, and here the men of old had dwelt. These holes were said to be full of golden armour and valuable gear, but no one had ever succeeded in reaching them, though it was said an Amban had once tried.

There were copper mines here, which used to be worked by two men, a father and his son from Kucha, but after their death the art was lost and all that remained was a midden of tumbledown houses and old ore. The scenery was strange. There were the

low Jaimal Hills, torn by rain and melting snow into deep precipitous gorges full of vegetation. From these curious hills I gazed towards the Tien Shan over a jumble of small cones and clay pyramids rising in serried rows. There were deep and dangerous fissures, furrowed in the soft soil by the occasional rain. What gave a charm to these clusters of pinnacles, huddled together so close that it was often impossible to pass between them, was the varied colouring ranging from deep red through pink and orange to a creamy white. Floating in the purple haze, these conical hills looked like a medley of spires flung together.

We returned to Kucha on November 24th and left it the next day. There is no traveller along the main road that has not stopped at Toghrak Dong, the Hill of the Wild Poplar, a bleak morose spot with a spring of brackish water. The filthy inn with its windows devoid of glass and paper, its rooms used as latrines, and its repulsive surroundings, shelters and disgusts every one. Therefore when next day we reached the pleasant Turki settlement of Kizil Ortang, we stopped for a couple of days to recover from the Hill of the Wild Poplar.

The Musart River runs nearby and in the soft loess cliffs by its left bank there were many Buddhist caves. Most of the frescoes had been removed by Professor Von Le Coq—providentially so for nearly all the remaining ones had been shamefully defaced by the local Mohammedans, only those that were inaccessible having escaped damage. It cannot be too often emphasised that it is solely due to European archæologists that any of the Buddhist treasures of

Turkestan have been saved from Turki fanaticism and vandalism.

We again passed through Bai, not that we wanted to see it, but because we could not avoid it. It is one of those many places I have always tried to dodge, but have never succeeded in doing so. It looked as unlovely as ever with its dirt and its goitres, but we were fated to visit it again.

Travelling by the upper road below the hills, we reached Aqsu on December 14th. The weather had now become very cold, and we suffered a good deal from mistaken hospitality, which accommodated us in large vault-like rooms which no one could warm.

At Aqsu Mr. Ju, the Taotai, entertained me to dinner, as was his hospitable way with all visitors. I felt a shabby, travel-stained foreigner, and I know I looked it. I was specially eclipsed by one of my fellow-guests, an Armenian doctor, a truly impressive figure in a long skirted white coat, a white sheepskin hat half a yard high, and with all his medicines arranged across his chest in small bottles, like cartridges in a bandolier.

It was bitterly cold at Aqsu so that at the yamen a small boy was employed to take care of callers' horses, which were fastened to a pole which revolved round an upright post. The child sat on the pole and gently drove the horses round and round, cursing quietly the while.

From Aqsu we journeyed to Yarkand, first passing Maralbashi. It was a dull road, but enlivened by the wayfarers. We met two Turkis having a fierce and bitter quarrel. The noise was immense, and the

matter was clearly serious. It turned out that the two men had been travelling together. One carried the bread, but when they stopped to eat, he gave a piece of bread without an onion to his friend. Hence the uproar—which we fruitlessly endeavoured to compose.

The Turki is tenacious of his property, and we were much amused by an old lady at a house we stopped in. In one of the servants' rooms were four eggs, some dozen melons and a handful of onions. She refused either to remove them or to sell them, but instead she sat up the whole night, amidst the snores of the scandalised Kashmiris, keeping watch over her precious property.

We noticed in the graveyards large wickerwork shelters, and found that they were used to protect the mullahs when the latter went to read the Koran by the graves. At night, with a small oil lamp burning, those shelters looked like corpse-candles amongst the tombs.

It was terribly cold, and we became rather depressed as the road was dull as far as Maralbashi, but fortunately fuel was often plentiful. The traffic was incessant, and hundreds of donkeys carried rice and other goods from Kashgar to the north.

Although the rice of Aqsu is famous, there seemed to be an unsatisfied demand for it in the north of the province, and these caravans toil throughout the year, bringing rice from all the places it is grown in. The dust was deep, thick and cloying; it was not possible to ride with dust to the knees so the problem of how to keep warm remained unsolved.

The long, soft leather boots of the country were a boon, as they kept the dust out. They are not very durable, but then the Turki never walks unless he is obliged.

Maralbashi was a small town with one very big, very dear and well-stocked bazaar, which is conveniently situated at the junction of the roads to Aqsu, Kashgar and Yarkand so that it imposes its terms on travellers. There was a small Chinese walled city, a wilderness of ruined houses and yamens with an air of dejection and neglect. The town proved unattractive, and one night was enough, but we had reason to remember the place, as a large beam fell down in the kitchen and missed Aziza, the cook, by a few inches.

We left for Yarkand on Christmas Day, 1928, with the Yarkand River on our left though usually out of sight. The road was heavy; the scenery, though monotonous, had a certain charm, with abundant reed, tamarisk and toghrak—the three chief ingredients of scenery in the plains of Turkestan. We were interested to notice the growth of settlements; new bazaars and villages, with their accompanying newly reclaimed fields, were evident the whole way to Yarkand.

We had an astonishing yayeh with us; everywhere he had a wife and family. It was not that he was satisfied with some frail but lonely female friend, but at most stages he owned house and land, wife and progeny. We were greatly impressed and wondered if the various families knew one another.

The people inhabiting the riverine tracts of the Yarkand Darya were usually Doulans—a different race from the Sarts and apparently more recently converted to Islam. However interesting they may have been in the past, they are now rapidly losing their characteristics, as intermarriage and association with the Turkis tend to obliterate the differences.

Thus we often found them hard to differentiate. At one village we came on men who said that they were Doulans and declared they were descended from a man of Darel near Chilas in north-west India. We noticed their fair beards and aquiline features. They were certainly not Doulans, who are of Kalmuck (Mongol) ancestry, though they might have had Darel blood in their veins. Probably the best way to identify the Doulans is by their dirt, for they themselves, their villages and their surroundings were conspicuously filthy. Another habit of theirs was a love of intoxicants, whether alcohol or hashish; and their graves were unorthodox, resembling those of the Lop folk.

The metropolis of the Doulans was Merket—extremely dirty but prosperous enough. The place had only been recently endowed with an Amban, and the Doulans had resented his arrival, and to such an extent that they had managed to drive off the first after a few months. The second was made of sterner stuff and had begun with success to reduce his subjects to order. He was a slight, gentle, young man of twenty-two, but had proved a regular tiger, and the truculent, surly Doulans had met their match. We saw a crowd of Doulans surrounding

the yamen, and found that they had been summoned there to be instructed how they should behave to those in authority. The Chinese possess administrative gifts which their official system prevents from being properly developed or utilised.

There were many graves outside Merket, besides a large shrine (mazar) on the top of a sandhill. The more fashionable tombs were marked by a pretentious pole, embellished with a cloth too good to be called a rag. The less important graves were marked by a mere piece of stick thrust into the grave. Raised tombs of mud were rare. As mud is so cheap and popular a material for sepulchre-making in Turkestan, it seems a fair deduction that the Doulans' method of marking graves was derived from primitive traditions.

Merket was worth a visit. Its situation was unusual, as it lay below a long row of isolated sand-hills which rise fortuitously from the plain. From these low hills it was possible to look down on to the town—dingy and congested but picturesque also, with its busy, thronged bazaar.

We continued south till we reached Yarkand, arriving there on January 2nd, 1929, in perfect winter weather, clear and sunny—a combination very rare in the Kashgarian winter climate, where the sun is seldom seen and a haze covers the countryside.

CHAPTER XIII

KHOTAN

WE skirted the walls of the old town of Yarkand, passing dreadful heaps of dead dogs, and put up at a clean but cold inn. Yarkand has often been described, but it is in many ways the most interesting town in the province. The old city is unspoilt, but the population appeared to us to be leaving it and settling in the adjoining new town. The narrow lanes often tunnelled under the houses, the carved wooden balconies threatened to tumble into the street, and on all sides were curious corners and curious buildings such as the Kuruk Kol or Dry Tank. Close by was the bright blue mosque of Haji Hakim Beg, with its carved pillars of dark walnut in delightful contrast.

The lion of the place is probably the Altun Mazar (Golden Shrine), with the grave of Hakim Beg, who, in the old days, was the great man of the place. The shrine itself with its motley flags struck us as insignificant compared with the fine large tomb covered with encaustic tiles, and it was still more dwarfed by the great mosque. Formerly the Chinese used to leave the government largely in the hands of the Begs, and Hakim was then a great man.

Opposite was the Kok Medresseh or Blue College, once frequented by Arabs and Seyyids, of

whom few remained. These two large buildings were suffering financially. The truth is that all Mohammedan charitable foundations have ceased of late years to attract the alms of the faithful. The Turki is fanatical but not devout, and with the Chinese indifference to the requirements of Islam, the Mullahs cannot procure the alms that once were forthcoming in the days of the Begs.

Yarkand is not, moreover, a wealthy town. It is still the largest city in Sinkiang, but it is purely agrarian and the wealth is in Kashgar or Khotan. Yarkand consists of three cities, all adjoining, and on bazaar-day the scene in any of these was unequalled, the streets being packed with a dense throng of yokels. We thoroughly enjoyed the bazaar-days, and agreed that we had never seen the like.

The Turki is a fine trencherman, and we realised that the chief occupation of the people in Yarkand was eating. On bazaar-days in particular the women come in from the country chiefly to gorge, and, on all sides, the slow rhythm of mastication may be heard. Men and women alike were always pre-occupied in this function—the chief business of life.

My first visit to Yarkand had been two years previously, in the late summer, when the melons were ripe and cheap. As I entered I saw a party of Sarts, four or five, men and women, perched on a wall and solemnly munching melons. Thirty-six hours later we again passed the same place, and there were the same Sarts, still eating melons. This sounds incredible, but it was so—and we marvelled exceedingly.

After a few days at Yarkand we set out and turned

east along the main road to Khotan, which led between the Takla Makan desert on the left and the Kuen Lun Mountains on the right—a road of great antiquity, but no longer a through route to China and almost unused. As far as Khotan it was a busy thoroughfare; beyond Khotan to Keriya, the traffic decreased, whilst farther on only a stray pilgrim or a harassed official used the ancient highway, once the famous silk road from China to Europe. We left Kainchi, the dog, behind us. He was a sad loss, but he had become rather restless lately, and as I found him a good home at the Swedish Mission it seemed the best thing to do. The weather was dull and cold and the journey to Khotan did not appeal to us. The prospect was uninviting, with flat plains, rather dingy under the grey sky, and mountains shrouded in haze, but there seemed nothing else to do but go on. The fact is that travel in the plains of Turkestan is rather a problem, as the summer heat makes movement undesirable, and the brief spring and autumn are often too short to cover the great distances involved. It is much better to accept discomforts and travel during the winter, for the advantages balance the drawbacks, of which perhaps the greatest is the want of sun. It is well, too, to bear in mind that travel on the plains of Turkestan is boring at any season of the year.

We started on January 16th, 1929, leaving two of the Kashmiris behind, as they were homesick and tired of travel. In their place I took on a strong 'argon,' half Ladakhi half Turki, who lived in Yarkand and knew several languages equally well.

The Yarkand River was at this season a mere trickle, and after crossing it we spent the first night at Posgam, an unattractive town which has a claim to fame for its goitres. So large are they that it is the common saying that a Posgam man cannot see if his horse is drinking water or not.

The south-eastern part of the province that we were now entering is probably the most purely Turki, because there is no through traffic and little intercourse with the non-Turki world. It is true that there is some traffic with India, but there is little with Russia or China, and the natural characteristics of the country and a certain primitiveness remain.

For the first few days the track went through fine agricultural land, but it was evidently inhabited by lazy farmers. The maize was cut off at the head, leaving the stalks to be eaten or not by the cattle. The road was dusty and traffic-laden, the people were sitting down by it and cleaning their corn of chaff and grit, which the wind replaced by dust from the road. My men thoroughly despised Turki peasants, and their hugger-mugger husbandry aroused scornful comment. 'What can you expect,' they said, 'from people who use their milch cows for ploughing?'

There was a good deal of traffic on the road, but it was almost wholly carried by donkeys which were laden with great quantities of paper made at Khotan—which is good enough of its kind. There were also many sacks of the big raisins produced in the Khotan district.

We noticed, too, that the village mosques were

more ornate and less utilitarian than elsewhere, and that there was often good carving in them. At some of the stages were large brick serais or inns, with stone-paved courts and concrete domes and a large mosque attached. These were comparable with the fine caravan serais of the Moguls in parts of India, and were built by Niaz Hakim Beg in the days of Yaqub Beg, the Mohammedan ruler of Turkestan in the middle of the nineteenth century. There was nothing resembling them anywhere else in the country, where the staple material is mud and wattle, and thus these fine old buildings promised to outlast everything else.

The serai of Turkestan is always equipped with a prostitute, and it seemed that, in these old halting-places at any rate, the wandering Sart could get the best of both worlds, with his Mullah and mosque on one side of the serai and his courtesan on the other.

We found the people rather surly, and the yayehs supplied were grumpy, giving a snort or a grunt in answer to most questions. One man in particular annoyed me, and I flew into a passion, asked him if he dared talk to his Amban as he did to me. The result was astonishing; the man became polite and affable, grew loquacious, bursting with information when required and warbling like a linnet.

Karghalik was the chief town on the road, and well known to travellers from India by the Karakoram Pass. There were miles of bazaars which, as in all Turki towns during the winter, looked rather mournful and dreary. The streets were covered with matting to keep the heat out; as this is never removed, there is a cold dank twilight throughout the winter,

and the half-frozen shopkeepers, squatting by their goods, increase the air of depression.

It was a dull road even for us who had never before traversed it. Water was often scarce and generally brackish; at times it was obtainable from tanks filled once a week in summer and not at all in winter. At one place the water was of the appearance and smell of sewage, and even the stomachs of the Turkis ached furiously. As a general rule the Turki members of the party only required medical aid after a gorge (which took place frequently, or at any rate whenever opportunity offered). Stout and strong is the Turki stomach, with a frame of iron, and experience taught me that only a handful of Epsom Salts, following one of calomel, could cope with this relic of the Iron Age. The ordinary remedies of the West were as useful as a spoonful of honey.

Let it be remarked that there is one great drawback to Turki food, namely, linseed oil. None of us could ever get used to it, and its effect on me was disastrous. Generally speaking, visitors are entertained with an excellent pilau made with mutton fat, and the result is soothing and satisfactory. Occasionally the stranger unsuspectingly eats one with linseed oil, as it is not so easily identified as might be imagined, and politeness triumphs at the expense of common sense. But what olive oil or butter are in Europe, so is linseed oil in Chinese Turkestan—cheap, popular and a gastronomic necessary.

As we progressed east we again observed that the graves were adorned with stuffed goatskins or sheepskins resembling those noticed in the Doulan

and Loplik districts. Although it was many centuries past, Kalmuck influence still asserted itself.

Turkestan used often to produce some unexpected resemblance to the West, as when, during a heavy storm, I heard some one whistling and there came along a fair-haired, rosy-cheeked farmer's boy for all the world as if he were in some county at home. I was often struck by similar resemblances, and the old Turki farmers at the bazaars were the counterparts of many farmers at home. The Sart is often not dark or even sallow, and so these accidental likenesses are commoner than elsewhere in the East.

We reached Khotan on January 19th, 1929, in bitter weather. The town has a great reputation as a manufacturing centre, and the people are considered more artistic and cleverer than elsewhere. Everywhere we had been told that we should get such and such a thing at Khotan, and we had been led to expect too much from the only large town we had not yet seen.

Undoubtedly, Khotan possessed attributes which we had not met elsewhere. Yet we did not like the place. The town, the people, and the surroundings struck me most unfavourably, though other travellers have praised them all. We found the people mean, rapacious and stingy; their bargaining methods were primitive—and usually unsuccessful—and their business reputation seemed overrated. We had travelled much in Central Asia and had learnt to expect little from the Turki, but even that little we failed to find at Khotan.

During six days of the week the bazaar was closed, and the few shops open hardly supplied the necessaries of life. The inevitable bargaining was also tedious, as the fashion in Khotan was for the purchaser to fly into a passion, use most hair-raising epithets, and then with a final crescendo of foul abuse, name the last price possible—and leave the shop. The bargain was clinched or not, as the seller realised that the highest price had been offered, and had to make up his mind. The gentle interplay of give and take was absent.

As to the goitres, the number and size were remarkable. We had been to the places renowned for these afflictions, but at Khotan we realised that the goitres we had seen before and those we now saw were as a hailstone to a cannon-ball.

There appeared to be a great lack of good mud at Khotan; consequently the houses were nearly all built of daub and wattle, through which the cold air came creeping in spite of numdahs, rugs, mats and paper—the last crammed into the interstices. Baked brick was too dear for general use, and the presence of sand in the ground was said to prevent the mud binding, hence the daub and wattle instead of solid unbaked mud houses. I doubt if the real cause was not laziness.

The industries of Khotan were carpet-making, silk, paper and jade. The only good carpets were made by an Armenian merchant of great culture and skill—Mr. Karekin Moldovack. The modern carpets were nearly all lamentable products spoilt by aniline dyes and bad design, and their texture

adulterated with hair and refuse. Favourite designs were large tea-pots and cups and saucers on a table, or else an immense peacock of shocking hue. There were some better designs, but the cruder motifs seemed popular. The silks were good, the patterns restrained and harmonious, and some of the colourings very soft and pleasing, though the advent of aniline dyes had proved harmful here as elsewhere.

Much has been said about the jade industry in Khotan, but nowadays the times are not favourable to it. The jade exists in large quantities, but it has to be exported to the cutters in China. The distance is great, the journey is long and arduous, and so practically no jade is now sent. The chief difficulty lies in the lack of local cutters. There is a kind of jade worked at Khotan, but it is really the softer jadite; genuine jade is very hard and quite beyond the power of the Turki to work.

The paper produced is made from mulberry leaves, and is universally used throughout the province. There is also a large cotton-weaving industry, which is remarkably good both in design and execution.

Life in Khotan was complicated, too, by the method of reckoning money. For example, the copper cash with a hole in it is known throughout the country as two pul. In Khotan it was, logically but exasperatingly, called one pul, so that one tenga became two tengas. The confusion was constant.

The women of Khotan had a poor reputation for womanly virtue, as we were grieved to discover; they must indeed be bad to acquire such a name

in a land where moral standards are incredibly low. Our four pony-men, none young and all possessed of the patriarchal allowance of wives (with families to correspond), contracted temporary marriages at Khotan. To dally with these local charmers the ponies were neglected and much inconvenience caused. When we left Khotan after a stay of ten days the farewells of the newly-divorced ladies and their ephemeral spouses were quite touching. According to the law, these divorcees would have to remain unwed for a hundred days, but laws in Turkestan (as elsewhere) are often made only to be broken.

When we left Khotan, Abdulla Beg pungently endorsed the opinion of us all—'The people of Khotan are pigs!'

CHAPTER XIV

KASHGAR AND THE DESERT SHRINE

For various reasons I now decided to go to Kashgar, so we returned along the same road as we had come to Yarkand and Kashgar. We visited the Shrine of the Pigeons on the edge of the desert and close to the road; this was originally an old serai—an interesting place as being full of pigeons which breed in the rooms and are so well fed by passers-by that the ground is strewn with maize which the gorged birds cannot eat.

The weather was very severe, and heavy snow fell, making the journey, always monotonous, more wearisome than ever. We sympathised with the garrison at Guma, whose warm clothes had not arrived and who shivered in their thin cotton rags. Yet generally the Turki seemed to us singularly indifferent to cold, and we were amazed to see the men sitting placidly before their open shops and the women remaining out till late at night, gossiping unconcernedly and wearing no extra clothes. The only sign of cold was that many people went about holding their noses.

We met an old soldier of the Amir Yaqub Beg (known as Bedaulat or Fortunate One), who, in the last century, had seized the country and ruled it sternly, as a Moslem ruler should. The veteran

had nothing but praise for his old master, and he reviled the people for letting the Chinese re-occupy the country without opposition. The truth is, however, that the Turki is no politician, and Chinese rule is not unpopular.

At Guma the Amban sent me a gift of pomegranates, and a message (to which I replied sympathetically) announcing the death of thirty-five of his relatives in the recent disturbances in China. When I next went to Guma the poor man had died—I fear from shock at this sad holocaust of his kinsfolk.

The wind was very strong and, as we continued on our journey, the cold increased. I felt sorry for the local pigeons, victims of the customs of the country. The Turki erects a perch for them on the top of a high pole put up in his house, and on these aerial masts empty gourds are hung in which the birds can nest. He likes to sit below and watch the birds and hear them coo. The birds do not, however, seem to object to these rather inconvenient roosting-places. Pigeons are not considered sacred by the people, but doves are sacrosanct. As we all of us enjoyed doves, preferably roasted, Daulat and Abdulla would shoot them with an air-gun. Any bad luck that we met with was always attributed to the slaying of the doves.

We reached Kashgar in due course and were most kindly welcomed at the Consulate, the comfort of which was highly appreciated after the rough accommodation on the roads. After a little rest I took the opportunity, before going again to the north of the province, to visit the famous shrine of Ordam Padshah,

in the desert between Kashgar and Yarkand. The weather was favourable; the snow had gone, thanks to a warm sun; the green grass was sprouting; the people were sitting out, and the babies lay in the sun to bake in front of the houses.

It was the Fast of Ramazan, which the Turki religiously observes, and it was pathetic to see all the good food in the bazaar which had to remain untouched till nightfall.

When we left the cultivation and entered the desert, we came upon a regular belt of shrines all much of the same type, the great feature being the lofty poles bundled together and erected on the top of a sandhill. The flags fluttered from the poles, rags innumerable ornamented their base, and the whole was at once a landmark and a sacred object.

The first shrine had been erected in honour of the cook of the Ordam Padshah worthies, and a noble tower it was. Yet when I told Aziza, the cook, that I would erect to him an equally honourable one, if the sad occasion arose, he appeared unappreciative.

As we approached Ordam Padshah itself, we stopped the wayfarers we met to enquire about the shrine, but no one could tell us anything. We were not surprised at this lack of information, as it had always been the case whenever we went on pilgrimage. At any rate we expected that an agreeable pilgrim, who was newly returned from Mecca, would throw some light on his local saints; but he would talk of nothing except how cheap and good was the sugar-candy of Bombay, which was the sole recollection of his journey.

It was a dull rainy day when we reached the high sand-dunes, in the midst of which the Mazar was situated. The rain made the sand of the desert easy for the horses, but for us the prospect was rather gloomy. The sheikhs and other rogues who fleeced the pilgrims lived in a small hamlet a mile from the shrine, and there was a well of brackish water, marked by a single tree, to supply the village.

Daulat used to travel with a Persian guide-book to the chief places of pilgrimage of the Moslem world, and he cross-examined the sheikhs somewhat ruthlessly. Their story—which it is wholly unnecessary to believe—was that a king came from China and founded a city on the site of the present shrine. The full moon one night entered the room of his only daughter, coming in by the door and leaving by the skylight. Her child was born in due course and the astrologers and wizards found subsequently that the happy event had been foretold. The child became Ali Arslan, a mighty champion of Islam, but he was finally slain by the infidels, and his body was buried beneath the present shrine. When we asked why so great and holy a warrior was commemorated by so mean a sepulchre, the sheikh artlessly told us that all efforts to raise a monument worthy of Ali Arslan had miraculously failed, and that the only enduring memorial to him was found to be the bundle of flags and poles. The explanation was admirable. It explained at once how the shrine came to be there, why it was so famous, and why the rich offerings of the pilgrims were never spent—except on the guardians of the place.

Thousands of pious folk flocked there during the great Islamic feasts, and the shrine is widely reverenced as one of the chief sacred places in Central Asia. Special sheikhs are detailed to attend to the different parties of worshippers from the neighbouring towns.

A few miles farther on lay the tomb of Hazrat Begum, the wife of Ali Arslan, and the path thither was very exhausting over dunes of soft heavy sand. The spring seemed to have gone as suddenly and capriciously as it had come. Bitter winds swept the desert, and the extortionate demands of the sheikhs had emptied our pockets, spoilt our tempers and damped our fervour.

Thus it was that, when we finally reached the lady's shrine and saw that it was, appropriately, a meaner and smaller replica of her husband's, we all felt that we needed a comfortable night's rest before anything else; and so, with a casual glance, we hurried past. The sheikh of the place, however, had heard of us and of our rich offerings at the neighbouring shrine, and he was not going to lose us. He rushed out at us. First he followed on foot; then, in an agony of anticipation, he sent for his horse, mounted and pursued us relentlessly. He clung to us, closer than a brother; his voice became strident, but we were all obdurate and refused to go to his shrine. Finally, the pious man left us amid the grins of the party. I grieve to say that, when he realised that we meant to give him nothing, he stopped and reviled us loud and long, and as we padded away on the sand, we heard his curses coming

hoarsely after us. My men thoroughly enjoyed the whole affair.

We spent a most comfortable night at a large serai hidden away in the hills, the existence of which we had not dreamed of. The old caretaker did all he could for us, and we soon sat by roaring fires with all the horses under cover, while outside the snow fell ceaselessly. The slush and mire on the road to Kashgar made progress slow, but we finally got back there on March 2nd, 1929.

CHAPTER XV

AGAIN TO THE NORTH

As the winter ended, I began to make my arrangements for the summer, and my thoughts turned to the mountains. I forgot the storms of the Tien Shan, and remembered only the deep valleys and noble summits, and longed to see them. So I determined to travel to Ili by the Musart Pass, and visit new ground from there. We should have to pass Aqsu again, as all our devices for avoiding that place had failed, so cunningly is it sited athwart every artery of traffic. It would have been rude to pass by a place where we had always been made so welcome; moreover, the boredom of the road might be modified by a short excursion amongst the lagoons, backwaters and wooded country that lay to the south of the highway.

Our departure from Kashgar for the north was delayed till the Fast of Ramazan (and the feast at its conclusion) had both been celebrated, and we left our kind hosts at the British Consulate and set out for the north of the Province on March 10th, 1929. We were a very altered party, as the only dog with us was Tihwa Ram, two Kashmiris had gone, and Ali Khan had shuffled his helots.

The weather was balmy, even hot, but the roads

were very slippery and animals were constantly falling. I noticed a Sart stamp brutally on a donkey's head when the creature fell on its side.

Our rather dull road was enlivened by our energetic yayeh, who was always on the look-out for a little extra cash, so that he never failed to admonish all evil-doers when he met them. Small and usually harmless little gambling-parties were broken up, and the delinquents were pursued and arrested. We felt we should not interfere with the course of justice in a foreign land. It was not easy work for the yayeh, but his usual plan was to seize the garments of the offenders, who had to redeem them as best they might.

We passed through Maralbashi and were asked to early morning tea at 6 a.m. by the leading British subject. I agreed on condition that it was tea only—and nothing else. To our grief and anguish (for we had breakfasted well) we found our kind host, Haji Abdul Aziz, had provided pilau, kabobs, roast chicken, and other gastronomic treasures enough to feed a battalion. We sorrowfully gazed at the noble feast, but not even the greediest of us could tackle it.

We were again travelling to Aqsu, but we made a détour through the densely-wooded country that lay to the south of the main road. A number of streams, sluggish, uncertain and often changeable, ploughed their way through the sandy soil. There were many backwaters and abandoned channels, showing how often the rivers changed their beds. The whole area was densely wooded with wild poplars and thick brushwood, but we hardly saw a human

being. Animals and birds were equally scarce, though the thick tamarisk and reed furnished cover and sustenance. For sixty miles we made our way through this uninhabited tract of river backwater and swamp, and very often we lost ourselves. The scenery was pretty at times with pleasant stretches of water reflecting the brown leaves, and with open glades which should have held deer. Rarely we heard a pheasant; sometimes Tihwa Ram would chase a hare. Generally the scene was a desolate and monotonous one. Now and then we came across an abandoned patch of cultivation, an old melon-bed, or a tumble-down hut, but that was seldom. Yet this kind of country stretched from Kashgar to Korla, a belt 600 miles long and of varying width. The various rivers, as they swept from the snowfields and glaciers into the Kashgarian plain, wandered at their will, changing their beds but never escaping from the ineluctable vegetation which they nourished. Now and then in this great area man established himself, and a town arose, but as a rule it was too uncertain owing to the fickleness of the rivers. The presence of population may eventually alter this (the land is habitable), but for the present it is far easier to develop new settlements elsewhere.

It was the season of burans—the dust-storms so frequent in the plains of the south—and most unpleasant they were. A mild one would clear the air and was tolerable, but the severer storms were often catastrophes, doing enormous damage over a wide area.

We gradually emerged from the fens and thickets,

and struck the main road to Aqsu, passing the curious mosque of Kizil Koraz, Atam ; the Turki translation of which is ' My Father Red Cock.' My irreverently flippant Hunza men were delighted at the name and laughed and chuckled. They asked many questions of the local inhabitants about this orthodox name, the explanation of which was rather far-fetched. Apparently, Koraz did not mean a cock (as it should in Turki), but that the lamented saint had come from Khorasan in Persia. Neither Abdulla nor Daulat would agree, shrewdly asking what the man's name was, as all reputable saints had names, and how did he get there. These two questions were complete posers for the simple Turki, who always got the worst of these religious arguments. I must say that the controversial and general expert equipment of the mullahs seemed everywhere meagre and out of keeping with their fanatical temperaments. The bigoted believer can usually produce chapter and verse for most of his arguments, but the Turkis conspicuously lacked any ammunition for their religious weapons.

We again noticed how, south of Aqsu, evidences of Doulan blood appeared ; the women were small, often under five-foot high, at the town of Abad, which was a miserable place, badly built of daub and wattle, full of pilferers and very dirty. Indeed, the people have the reputation of being some of the cleverest thieves in the country, and so this spot has pride of place as a criminal centre. Foodstuffs were cheap at Abad ; consequently all the beggars and paupers had flocked there and added to the already large number of undesirables. I know that two men were sent to

protect us and our belongings, and that on the way to take up their duties they stole two silver bangles from a woman in the bazaar, presumably as compensation for a night without the chance of thieving.

As we approached Aqsu we met hundreds of men planting poplars along the road by order of the Taotai, Mr. Ju. The process was very simple. A medium-sized tree is felled and chopped into lengths, which are then stuck into the earth at the side of the road and watered. They then grow, provided the watering is continued, but as the Turki is thoroughly unbusiness-like, most of the trees die for lack of this precaution in the early stages of their planting.

We had a pleasant stay at Aqsu, thanks to the genial Taotai. The city was otherwise unattractive. Under the brilliant sun its poverty was very evident, and a prodigious dinginess hung over it. Yet it is a populous place, the centre of a flourishing agricultural district ; though, even so, it is difficult to understand where all the people come from, and what they do. One explanation lies in the Turki habit of living in a town and going out to the fields when the crops are ripe. This is the usual practice of the well-to-do classes, who leave their property to a factor, and merely visit it occasionally. This further explains why so often there are no large houses near a town, but merely a few huts for the use of the employees.

From Aqsu we intended to travel to Ili (Kulja) by the Musart Pass, the chief route across the Tien Shan from north to south and frequented at all times of the year.

The narrow mouth of the Musart valley was

blocked by a wall with a Custom House in charge of a very polite official. Beyond there were a few hamlets and some forest. At one house which we stopped at, the old lady had been in charge of the post for sixty years and was full of memories but fuller of grumbles, as her ration of corn did not reach her regularly. I was surprised to learn that she had no pay for looking after the post, so her complaints seemed natural. I was delighted with one of her cats, a true ash-cat. It was mole-coloured and sat on the hob amongst the hot ashes, its fur gently sizzling the while. The Turki cat is a common feature of the domestic landscape, and is always a self-contained animal that no number of strangers can disturb.

After passing a night under a rock, we crossed the Musart Pass on April 8th, and were blessed with magnificent weather. The track is over a glacier to the top of the pass and is often troublesome, especially as there are series of steps up which the animals have to be man-handled. On the summit, there was heavy snow with a narrow, beaten path. If an animal or man stepped off it, they disappeared completely. Head-on collisions were unavoidable, and resulted usually in both parties vanishing into the snow. On occasions like this Ali Khan was invaluable. He bustled on the animals and we made good time, reaching camp on the northern side of the pass before dark. It was very wet on the far side, and we had to descend farther than we should have, but there was no help for it, since the usual halting-place was a bog.

There is a Turki legend that, under the Musart Glacier, there is a beautiful and fertile country. One day a Turki fell down a crevasse and gave himself up for lost—as well he might. As he continued falling, he grieved for his wives and his three orphaned families, but ceased to do so when he landed, safe and sound, on a wide and well-tilled plain. He mounted his horse and rode on till he came to an old man chopping wood, of whom he asked his way. He was told where to go, and was warned that, as fuel was scarce, he had better take some with him. As the old man said this, he kindly gave a handful of chips and shavings to the Turki, who put them into his pocket and rode on. But he was a true Turki—improvident and disbelieving—so he threw away the wood when he was out of sight of the old man. Suddenly he found himself on the north of the pass, and congratulated himself on his good fortune. Casually putting his hand into his pocket, he found that a few chips were left and that they were pure gold! He tried to retrace his steps to search for those he had heedlessly flung away, but he failed to find any.

We marched down a beautiful valley where the grass was covered with white crocus, and stayed a night at Shotta ('ladder'), the Chinese post at the mouth, and were most hospitably received. In front of us lay the broad rolling plain of the Tekes valley, which gives its name to the mountain region generally. We crossed the valley next day, but it was a long way over open prairie, boggy in places. The only house was the ruined Onion Inn, abandoned

owing to raids from the Russian side of the frontier, which was here only a few miles off. The weather continued fine; countless larks soared singing in the air; and, in front and behind, the whole sparkling panorama of the Tien Shan was unrolled.

We managed to ford the Tekes River, and next day came to a large Kalmuck monastery. The place covered a considerable area but did not impress us, as a number of hovels and shanties clustered round the main buildings, which much needed repair. The monks were most polite. They held their services under a large awning and gave me every facility to photograph them. It is curious how anxious all lamas are to be photographed.

The Abbot was a gentle, refined man of seventy-three, and he sent his servant, a refugee Pole, to ask me to see him. I found the poor old man very ill and anxious about himself. He had a bottle of very dubious Bolshevist port and wanted to know if it would do him good. I gave him a tonic, but parried most of his questions, as he seemed in failing health. His room and gear were rather dirty, and the whole place struck me as squalid. Masses of filth and débris lay about the monastery on all sides; the summer rains would have a task to wash down the place.

The weather changed and we were delayed by storms. The road now entered the hills that lay between the Rivers Tekes and Ili, and we wound up and down grassy spurs, crossed quite a high pass, and saw once more the Ili valley beneath us. We descended a glen full of wild apricot trees

in blossom, with blue iris, violas and yellow tulips in abundance everywhere.

We arrived at Ili on April 17th and were most kindly received by Father Hufnagel. We could not face the blatant publicity of the Roshan Bagh, so we put up at a serai.

Our second visit to Ili did not increase our esteem for this town, which looked dirty and out-at-elbow. The streets were deep in dirt, litter and filth. The Russian buildings with their broken dirty windows, peeling whitewash, grimy paint and air of neglect were depressing. These quasi-European houses always looked out of place. It is difficult to say why some towns seem bright and cheerful, others rather unkempt and dingy. Although business was brisk enough in Ili, yet it was all rather dreary; whereas cities like Kashgar, Turfan, and even Hami, were cheerful and pleasing. Yet they were built of mud just as Ili or Aqsu. Every one in the bazaar seemed to have something to sell, and it was usually a skin of sorts; so, as we moved about, a hand with a marmot or lamb or bearskin was always being thrust into our faces. The price asked was invariably about four times the market value.

The gambling quarter was close to the serai and, whenever I passed, I saw crowds of people squatting and gambling and, among them, police and soldiers, while hawkers of food and cigarettes wandered among the groups. I fancy it was all pretty harmless. One old man was very indignant when I began to photograph him, and moved off saying it was against the Koran. The crowds were highly amused when Daulat,



A Kashgar Barber Shaves a Girl's Head

in his clear resonant voice, asked whether gambling was allowed by the holy book.

I found that the former Amban of Aqsu had been transferred to Ili, and he entertained me to an immense and excellent dinner. He was a charming host, and discussed, with the vigour and accuracy of first-hand knowledge, the habits and dispositions of dragons, their propensities for descending suddenly on carpets, and other unusual properties possessed by them. Dragons are unknown in Sinkiang, although in Mongolia and in parts of western China they are fairly common. I promised my host that I would send him some dragon-meat—if I were fortunate enough to shoot one. We then passed to other subjects, and the Amban quoted Chinese poetry to the guests.

Another and very different dinner at Ili was with a most agreeable Bolshevist agent, who gave me a large meal in the lavish Russian style. The food was first-rate, but the quantity overwhelming. What horrified and fascinated me was the behaviour of my host's small daughter aged twelve months—not years —who devoured pickled cucumber, radishes dipped in sour cream, and roast beef, with synthetic port to finish up with. Her mother and grandmother helped the little creature to ruin her digestion in this fashion.

CHAPTER XVI

THROUGH THE TIEN SHAN TO URUMCHI

THE Tien Shan Mountains are divided by two parallel valleys which run east and west. The upper or northern one is the Kash, which we had ascended last year. The lower or southern is the Kunges, which I now determined to traverse. As, last year, the months of July, August and September had been uniformly wet; I innocently thought that April, May and June might be dry, and so we left Ili on April 23rd, 1929 (St. George's Day) in good spirits. Our route led east up the Ili valley with the broad river of the same name on our right, formed by the confluence of the Kash and Kunges Rivers. Our way went south of Mazar where we had stayed the night a year before. We had had enough of the town, and were glad to be on the road again. In a Turki town the European visitor has never a spare moment to himself; streams of visitors, who will not be denied, call at all hours. When not being visited, the foreigner is out visiting, so that a stay in a town is a most restless experience.

There are many snakes in the Ili valley, and the first night from Ili I was in the headman's house writing, and wondering why the sewing machine was so loud. Rising to find out, I came on a snake hissing quite cheerfully in my room. I do not know how

poisonous it was, but we sometimes saw horses lying on the ground dying from snake-bite. Snakes were even commoner in the Altai than in the Tien Shan.

Leaving the Kash valley on our left, we crossed the river by a primitive bridge and went up the broad plains of the Kunges valley. The weather was fine but hazy and at times hot. The spring flowers were abundant, especially blue iris, primulas, yellow poppies and berberis. On our right the Kunges River rolled distractedly in its wide bed, hidden by a dense growth of willow and brushwood, from out of which countless pheasants called. Geese, duck, chickor and grey cranes moved unconcernedly about. It was a blessing that, though shot-guns were common enough in Ili, cartridges were almost unobtainable; and, as the Kasaks and Kalmucks despised shooting birds, the circumstances were favourable to the ducks and geese. As exterminators of natural life, the nomads can yield to none.

The valley became more open farther up, but the scenery could not compare with that of the neighbouring Kash. Early though it was, with the snow but recently melted, the reeds were over two feet high and provided fare for the horses.

The country is wholly a Kasai Kasak area, except at the extreme end of the valley, where a few Kalmucks are allowed to herd their animals. The pastures were covered with fresh grass, on which countless animals were grazing. Many Kasaks were moving about and, although we never really cared for them, still we met pleasant and picturesque groups. One lady especially impressed me as she rode along with

a five months' old baby before her. She had trousers of bright chintz picked out with roses, a long coat of blue silk brocade, and a gold-embroidered kerchief on her head. Her two other sons, aged twelve and six years, rode on either side of her. As she accompanied us, she chatted pleasantly and politely, and made us regret that so few Kasak men were like her.

One place we camped at was known as The Three Pigeons, but I could not discover why. I remember the place well, as I was comfortably in bed when an incredibly stupid old Kasak asked me to come and see his sick child. It was a very cold night, and, on reaching his dwelling, I was struck by the comfort in which these nomads lived. I entered the thick felt tent, in which burnt a bright hot fire of dung. Round the sides were piles of gay quilts and pillows with an abundance of necessary, but not superfluous, gear. The family were all in bed, and the air of well-being and the cosiness of the scene impressed me. I saw to the child, which next morning had recovered. In a month or two the whole family would leave The Three Pigeons and move to higher pastures, where they would dwell in the same comfort as they did before.

The Kasak has few worries beyond his light taxation. The Chinese do not bother him, and on the whole his life is a good one. We saw many signs of abandoned fields and ruined houses as we progressed, as much of the Kunges valley was well adapted for agriculture. Sarts would come and settle,

tempted by the free and easy tillage, but they never stopped. Sometimes they married Kasaks, and exchanged the humdrum life of the peasant for the care-free existence of the nomad, who never has to study the skies or watch the ground. Others were driven out by the Kasaks, who disliked the prospect of a resident alien population. In some places the Kasaks did a little farming but, generally speaking, they greatly objected to agriculture, and the little done was due to the ease of the work—and the profit realised.

Just where the Kunges valley contracted was Aral Tepe or the Isolated Hill, a mound which was visible for three days before we reached it. Here was a derelict village and the headquarters of the chief Kasaks of the valley, Urus and Turus, father and son. They were two jolly, hearty rogues, inveterate horse-copers and stealers of horses, complete and utterly unabashed liars, thieves by instinct and upbringing, and yet most hospitable, courteous and well-informed men. The father had given up the headship to his son, but he was still a hale man of seventy, busily engaged in rearing a young and increasing family, although his previous matrimonial adventures had left no risk of his race dying out.

We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves with Urus and Turus, and they with us. But we never let them have a chance of stealing. The secret of dealing with these horse-stealers is, on arrival, to hand over all the horses to the leading desperado, tell him to detail men to feed and attend them foı payment, and then all will be well. The trouble is,

of course, that often there is no head man to whom to make over the animals; and then, like the Wolf on the Fold, the Kasak comes down at night and the horses are stolen. The old Governor of the province used to shoot every horse-thief—and quite rightly, for, in Chinese Turkestan, a man's life depends on his horse.

We were sorry to leave our two unprincipled hosts and we said good-bye with warm affection, tinged with relief. We crossed a level plain, all white with apple-blossom, and entered a narrow, thickly-forested and very difficult valley. Mountain and glacier, rock and forest, combined to make a lovely scene, and a couple of days of fine weather made the country appear at its best.

We now re-entered a Kalmuck area. We sadly missed the Kasaks, though we often reviled them. It is usual, I know, to praise the former and abuse the latter, but I have never been able to understand why. The astounding filth of the Mongols condemns them at once; one can always live with Kasaks in a considerable degree of comfort.

There were fine hot springs in one of the side valleys, and we found a regular bathing establishment there with the water so hot as to be only just bearable. There were many of these springs, and wooden baths had been built in the ground for the patients frequenting this spa. There were coloured pictures of the Buddha over the bath, and mounds of mutton bones, the remains of patients' dinners, all over the ground. It was a lovely place to take a cure in, with grand scenery all round.

The head of the Kunges valley was open and down-like, and there were small tarns hidden amongst the folds. One was especially attractive, with a clump of spruce and fringed with reeds. Mallard, teal, sheldrake, and a solitary goose were swimming in it, but the Kalmucks declared it was unhealthy and that anyone who camped near it suffered from rheumatism or a bad rash.

We were snowed up for two days before finally leaving the Kunges for the Yulduz. We crossed a low easy pass, and entered a very different country. Just as the western ranges of the Tien Shan are penetrated by the two long valleys of the Kash and Kunges, so the eastern ranges are divided by the Yulduz valley, which carries all the drainage past Qarashahr and so into the Konche River and the Lop district.

Yet there could be no more singular contrast in scenery than the valleys we had just left and those we were to enter. Our route from Ili had led us to fine mountains clothed with forests, to glaciers, to wide snowfields, and to soaring precipices. We stepped over a low pass and saw in front of us rolling, down-like mountains, barren save for some thin grass. There was not a bush near, still less a tree, yet a few yards behind the thick spruce forest clothed the hillside. We were in a truly Tibetan upland, bleak, barren, inhospitable.

A vast stony stretch of country spread itself out, and we clattered down till we came to a cluster of tents of the Torgut Kalmucks. The flocks were devouring the fresh, wiry and nutritious grass. The

season had just opened, and the nomads were only now moving into the higher valleys. The weather in the Yulduz is always trying, rain and wind being constant even in summer, and in August, the scanty grass is eaten away and the flocks are driven to lower pastures.

We were now in the Little Yulduz, the upper reaches of the district—and disliked what we saw of it. The wind swept unchecked over the rounded hills, and there was a bleak monotony that depressed us. The dust-haze was considerable and was a frequent occurrence as it was blown up from the southern desert.

We continued our journey over an undulating plain and wiry grass with patches of snow, but, on the whole, it was little better than a desert. Water was already getting scarce, and there was no fuel except such scanty dung as we could pick up. The Kalmucks were consistently disagreeable, but we did not care about that, considering ourselves better than all these unwashed.

After four days of dull weather, varied by squalls of snow, we reached the top of the Zagastai or Fish Pass, on which there was an elaborate cairn, or obo, dedicated to the Spirits of the Mountains. There were many small offerings of sugar, bread and the like, which were at once devoured by the dogs.

The distance seemed endless as we groped our way down one valley and up another—all stony and all unprofitable. We continued steadily eastward, dogged by daily snowstorms and haunted by anxiety for fuel. We were bored to tears. There was nothing

to see, no wild animals, no flowers, nothing—only those low stony valleys with an occasional shallow lake and sometimes a dilapidated tent hidden in a sheltered depression.

Our sole object was to clear out of the country as soon as possible, but the weather got worse and the snow became almost continuous. It saddened me to see poor Aziza, the cook, trying to heat something over a pile of wet horse-dung—always poor fuel even when quite dry—whilst the snow fell heavily on him. Once, under a rock, we found a cache of sheep's dung in beautiful, large, dry cakes—a welcome change after the sodden horse-manure. The cairns of the Kalmucks suffered, as we pulled out pieces of wood. On one occasion we found the trellis-work of an old tent, and it burnt bravely. The Kalmucks consider it unlucky to burn it, and thus we profited, but perhaps our subsequent bad luck, and the unusually bad weather we experienced, were due to our sacrilege.

After two weeks of this journeying amid storm and cold we were wondering when we should escape from the rock, snow and wet dung. The snow especially had been very heavy. One day, when we were completely lost, we found a miserable party of lamas squatting in a little tent half-buried in a drift. They showed us the way and, after a long weary struggle in the blinding snow, we arrived at last at the Algoi valley, which runs due east to Toksun, a town we had visited eighteen months before on our way to Turfan.

Here were some tents pitched on an open snow-covered, windswept plain, one of which belonged to

a Tungan merchant, Kemal Akhun. If ever there was a good Samaritan, it was this Tungan. We arrived rather the worse for wear, and he loaded us with all he had—grain for the horses, sugar and dried fruit for the men, and large noble logs of wood, supplies which were naturally unprocurable without his kindness. This was by no means the first time that we received kind treatment from a Tungan. Kemal had lived for six years amongst the Torgut Kalmucks and his views about these people were strong. He reserved his chief invective for their filth, cowardice and inhospitality, but, as he traded profitably with them, he suffered these unpleasantnesses for the sake of his livelihood. But I doubt if it were worth it.

The only one of us who enjoyed the journey was Tihwa Ram, who caught many hares in the snow and who liked the cold. He was never so happy as lying on a piece of ice or bathing in a freezing stream, which was natural enough since the old dog was a native of the Yulduz. A fine Kalmuck horse, which we had only just bought, died in the Algoi for no apparent reason.

We said good-bye to our kind friend, who would only accept a pair of sun-goggles, and we continued down the Algoi. This proved to be a sheltered valley and as we proceeded we met poplars and willow trees, with much undergrowth and a little grass. There was a pleasant stream and many Kalmuck tents, but the sides of the valley were very arid. When we reached the mouth of the glen, where it debouched into the broad stony desert that stretched through

low barren hills to the outskirts of Toksun, we had descended to 2,500 feet above sea-level, and climatic conditions were very different.

At the edge of the desert the stream ceased abruptly and never reappeared. The trees, shrubs and grass also vanished, and we camped by the familiar desert plain of which most of the province is composed. We had thirty miles to travel before the nearest water could be reached, so as it was hot and the desert would be trying, for the sake of the animals we started in the late afternoon.

We never suspected what was coming as there were no signs of any change in the weather. Gradually the wind got up, and by midnight it was blowing a gale. The cold, too, was intense. We had to stop where we were, fling off the roads, and cower on the ground. We were pelted with gravel and small stones and half-buried in grit and sand. We halted as we were till dawn, huddled together for warmth and protection. The wind lessened a little as the light grew stronger, but it continued to blow. We managed, however, to start again but it was not easy. We had lost five horses besides a good deal of our lighter gear, such as coats, hats, waterproofs and so forth, all blown away and never recovered. The storm lasted for sixteen hours. We rejoiced when we reached the first houses of the Toksun oasis.

The damage done by the storm was found to be great. The karez, or underground channels on which the district depends for irrigation and which always need care, had been choked with sand. The whole population had turned out, digging like beavers

to clear out the well, and so get the irrigation system working before the crops were burnt by the sun. In the hills the cold had killed thousands of sheep, and caravans of camels had perished. Walls had fallen down and buried old women sheltering beneath them. Indeed everywhere there were death and destruction.

I confess that I used to make light of the Turki buran or dust-storm, regarding it as a poor imitation of its Indian kinsman, but my views changed to wholesome respect after this storm.

We stayed a few days at Toksun where we bought some ponies, as we found a number of excellent ones could be had. The best of them were lost a few days later on the way to Urumchi, amongst the low hills south of that town, where every year numbers of horses disappear. It is a hopeless task to search for them amongst the grassy downs with their small intricate valleys.

We reached Urumchi on June 10th, pursued by a raging wind.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BOGDO OLA

THIS was my fourth visit to Urumchi, which I had now seen in all seasons of the year. Although I always left it with regret for the kind friends I had made, and for the hospitality and help I had received, my affection for the place did not increase. On this occasion the town had suffered from the storm we encountered in the Algoi. The rain had descended like a water-spout, destroying the houses and turning the mud bricks back into their original slime.

After such a downpour the weather promised to be fair for a few days, and I set out for Bogdo Ola, that noble mountain range that lies to the east of the city, and of which the great peak dominates the scenery for miles and where I intended to spend a few days. I could only spare a few as there was much before us in visiting the range before leaving Urumchi for the south.

Urumchi, I found, possessed one great advantage which compensated for most of its drawbacks, and that was to be found in the fine scenery that lay nearby. A long ride would take one into the lower valleys of the Tien Shan, either to the east or west, whilst a couple of days enabled the inner valleys to be reached.

We skirted the foothills, and saw corn growing everywhere, and many fields and farms were tucked out of sight in the green fertile valleys that wandered down to the plain. There was plenty of water, and many crops were grown without irrigation. There were numerous Chinese farms, and these appeared conspicuously better than the others. My Hunza men never failed to admire the successful industry of the Chinese farmers, and thought them even better as market-gardeners.

In Central Asia mountains hold their secrets more closely than elsewhere; thus these foothills, commonplace and monotonous as they looked at Urumchi, turned out to be glens and dales of great charm. They were now at their best, at the height of the short Zungarian summer, with their clear streams, magnificent crops of wheat and barley, and fine trees. Everywhere, too, were gorgeous poppy-fields just in blossom. The pastures were rich and heavy, and the whole scene was prosperous.

So we continued, until we reached the long Fukang Ghol, a valley which led to the lake, and had the best-made path I had seen in the whole province. The valley was very narrow, with steep sides and a pleasant stream, and the bed was crowded with Kasak tents.

These nomads were indifferent specimens of their kind and seemed to me more or less permanently in the same place — which was not good for them or for the valley. They made, nevertheless, a congruous setting by the stream, with the trees

over their circular tents and the perpendicular sides above.

A short steep rise brought us to the lake. On all sides the mountain descended abruptly to the shores; beyond was the snow-covered massif of Bogdo Ola. There were several temples round the lake, but they were usually hidden, which was just as well, for they would have marred the prospect.

It was extremely difficult, owing to the thick jungle and sharp, steep slopes, to reach the opposite end of the lake into which the main valley drained, but we managed to do so although we found a path on the western side only. The undergrowth was very dense and the number of fallen trees made progress slow. Mushrooms were plentiful and of several kinds, and we gathered a great many. There was one conical-shaped sort which was abundant though in other places usually a rarity, and we ate large quantities of it. Mushrooms are common in the Tien Shan and Altai and are collected by the Kalmucks and sold to the Chinese. Neither Sarts nor Kasaks, however, will eat them. We used to make our Turki pony-men cook some, but they were determined not to like them.

We took a Kalmuck boy with us, yet when we crossed the stream at the end of the lake, an easily fordable one, he was terrified, though he had been born and bred in the mountains. Kalmucks dislike fording streams far more than Kasaks or Kirghiz, though whether from fear of drowning or dislike of having even a partial bath is not known. Quite the

best men for fording rivers are the Turkis, who make comparatively little fuss when a stream has to be crossed.

The scenery at the end of the lake was lovely indeed. The pastures were rich, the sky blue and cloudless, and the view idyllic. Thus it was a disappointment, by the time I reached my camp, to find that the glory of the day had departed and that heavy clouds were collecting.

Herr Haude of the Sino-Swedish Expedition (which had entered the province under the leadership of Dr. Sven Hedin) called on me, and next day I went at his suggestion to the temple high above the lake, where I spent the night with him. He was most hospitable and I enjoyed my stay. He had a small dog called Abdulla, and I only hoped that my Abdulla would not discover that animal's name, as he might not appreciate the compliment. Herr Haude was amused when I told him and promised to keep silence.

Bidding farewell to my kind host, we started for Urumchi, but by a route higher than, though parallel to, our previous one. The result was a shorter but more arduous journey as there were many steep spurs to be crossed. The Kasaks were most friendly and came out with offerings of milk and eggs. Generally, these particular tribesmen had a bad reputation, and we were surprised to discover how affable they were, but perhaps it was just our luck.

On returning to Urumchi, I met two more members of Dr. Sven Hedin's Expedition—Professor

Yuan and Dr. Nils Ambolt. They were both very agreeable, but the former was often out and I saw more of Dr. Ambolt, whom I much admired. They entertained me at an excellent dinner, and I enjoyed myself greatly. Professor Yuan had been discovering dinosaurs, and he showed me interesting photographs. He expected shortly to return to China to fill a chair at Peking University to the great loss of the Expedition.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TIEN SHAN FROM NORTH TO SOUTH

Having by now wandered twice across the Tien Shan from west to east, I thought that it would be a variant, as well as a relief from the odious main road with its stinking serais, mountains of offal, and monotonous desert-ridden aspect, to make for Kucha by crossing the mountains from north to south. I knew that there was such a route, though how good or bad it was no one could tell me, but it would certainly be interesting and the ground was new. Every one did their best to dissuade me, except Ali Khan, who was different from the rest of his species, and never, to his credit, objected to hill or plain, desert or town, merely because there was hardship or trouble in such a journey. If his horses could be fed and watered, he was ready to go anywhere. He was a great man, if a maddening one.

We left Urumchi on July 4th and were seen off by our friends, who accompanied us as far as the bridge below the Red Temple, which gives its name to the town. Mr. McLorn came armed with a two-gallon bottle of the local wine, and very good it was. We drank each other's health — to keep up our drooping spirits—and even Abdulla and Daulat

overcame their scruples and drank a good tumblerful each.

It was a fine afternoon—we had started late—and Urumchi viewed from a distance looked attractively mediæval, with its high ramparts, fields ablaze with poppies, and scarlet lilies growing right up to the gates. It might have been five centuries old instead of five decades as it actually was.

We had a new dog. We were always having new dogs—this was the twelfth—and he was tied to one of the men's horses. The horse saw a convenient bog and bolted, the dog flying through the air and howling in a melancholy fashion. It was not for long, as everything parted company, and rider, dog, tiffin-basket, bedding and other odds and ends fell into the mud with a thud.

Our direction was south across the Tien Shan to the head of the Yulduz, from which we intended to traverse the southern Tien Shan to Kucha. We passed through well-cultivated country, of a type similar to that on the way to Bogdo Ola, and we soon found ourselves in the forest. Looking back, we could see the bare red hill of the Devil's Mount marking the position of Urumchi, which is not easily descried owing to its situation in a hollow. In front were high, pine-clad hills, with white torrents dashing down and snow peaks glistening beyond.

We were much delayed by torrential rain and by the number of passes to cross. The chief pass was the Tengri Dawan, which was comparatively easy on the north but awkward on the south, where it

was very steep—more like the wall of a house than the side of a mountain. This pass is a most important one as it is the only possible one—despite drawbacks—in that part of the mountain range.

We camped that night in the Babaghai Sala, or Wife's Ravine, and imagined we were safe as we had seen no one. But we had reckoned without a Kalmuck hunter who, high up in the hills shooting marmots, had spied us from his eyrie. So, in the morning, our four best horses—including Daulat's King Mulberry as well as an excellent old creature who had been with me since 1926—had all vanished. As soon as we realised what had happened we gave chase. Daulat rushed off bare-footed and running hard, but although he gave chase for twelve hours and sometimes saw his quarry, he finally lost sight of the thieves.

Horse-stealing is the curse of the Tien Shan, and let travellers in that wet, if beautiful, region be wary. Hospitality and respectability are no safeguard, as your host will rob you while he is killing his last sheep for you.

We crossed that night into one of the side valleys that drain into the Yulduz, and crawled down with the heavy rain lashing us and the ground like a quagmire. We camped where we had stayed in equally bad weather two months before. Then it was snowing; now it was raining and we were equally wretched.

We found ourselves still unable to cope with the Torgut Mongols. We had had dealings with many races, including other Kalmucks, but the Torguts defeated us. Here, for instance, Abdulla went,

cash in hand, to buy wood, and the grinning squaw promptly hit him on the hand—to his grief and surprise. Let me remark that Abdulla was a pleasant fellow and had a way with him—but not apparently with this beldame.

The Kalmucks are usually described as a simple, if dirty, race but they hardly deserve any encomium. The wealthy members of the tribe are agreeable, but the rank and file—the great body of the clan—are a drunken, gambling, useless lot. Their tents stank of liquor, and we found their inhabitants generally fuddled, often discourteous, and always lazy; and the filth must be seen to be believed.

Side by side with these unsavoury dwellers on their middens would be the tents of the upper classes. These tents were clean, roomy and well-furnished—often with beautiful silks, furniture and gear, such as silver-mounted saddlery and valuable trappings. These better-class Kalmucks, too, had a passion for modern trash, and suit-cases, gramophones, Homburg hats, cameras, thermos-flasks and the like would be flung about in incongruous confusion. It may be noted that the Kalmucks dislike the use of the word 'Kalmuck,' since now that the Mohammedans use it as a handy term of abuse, the original owners find its sound distressing.

We went on with considerable difficulty as the loss of four horses inconvenienced us, and there was consequently a great deal of unwilling walking. Not that anyone minded that, but there were endless streams to be forded and time was lost. Animals,

too, had to be overloaded, as a deficiency of four horses means much discomfort in a small caravan. We still had two good donkeys, Annas and Caiphas, who had been with us for months, but they were more useful on a high road than on a mountain track. All donkeys have a tendency to sit down under any hardship, and we found that, if a river was too deep or too stony, the donkeys would just sit down in the water and placidly begin to drown before our eyes. That always meant wading above our waists into the water and man-handling the little beasts. Personally, I always thought that donkeys were a mistake in a horse-caravan, but Ali Khan and other Turkis are fond of them as a sort of stand-by. They are little trouble and can be ridden by the men when not loaded. They are cheap to buy and cheap to feed, and that is a consideration with the Turki—and with most other people too.

Our only hope now was to go to the chief of the Torguts and demand our horses and, as his headquarters lay on our way, we proceeded to do so. It was a custom of the country for the local tribesmen to be responsible for the loss of visitors' animals; like most good customs it was always honoured in the breach and its rare observance was due to pressure. Daulat rejoined us after a day's absence, with a melancholy tale of wet, cold and hunger, and with his feet in a bad state. But he had been very plucky and deserved better luck.

Travellers of any kind are rare in the Yulduz, so our surprise and delight were great when we found,

hidden in a shallow valley which afforded poor shelter from the bitter wind, the tents of Messrs. Hunter and Mather of the Chinese Inland Mission at Urumchi. These two gentlemen were on their way to Ili, but their Kalmuck servant, Nimgher, had fallen ill with typhoid fever and they had stayed to nurse him.

These devoted missionaries tended him night and day and unquestionably saved his life. Dr. Hunter was no longer young and had to cook over wet horse-dung—the only fuel there was, while Mr. Mather had to attend to the horses. They had a Chanto servant who confided to my men that he would have run away before if he had known the way. He was, naturally, quite useless.

I could do little to help them, and I regret now that I did not do more. Nimgher recovered, and his masters were none the worse for their kindness to him, but sorry indeed I felt for them in that exposed, barren plain. A few miles on there were tents, where they would have fared better. We met their servant's brother next day, told him about Nimgher and instructed him to send some milk and fuel—which I am quite sure he did not do.

In brilliant weather and escorted by an army of horse-flies and mosquitoes, as well as by two men whom the wang had sent to meet us, we arrived at the headquarters of the Regent of the Qarashahr Mongols.

The extensive pastures of the Yulduz are in the hands of Mongols, and every year their ruler, with the principal lamas, moves up to the head of the valley

to escape the heat of the lowlands. The summer quarters consisted of a three-storeyed white-washed house, with outbuildings built in the Russian style and looking very incongruous in these secluded highlands. Round the buildings were the orderly ranks of the tents of the chief officials of the Regent. Some way off we saw a squalid bazaar, which was inhabited only for the brief summer season by traders. On one side of the camp were the tents of the lamas, but these could not compare in appearance or quality with the monastery of the Zungur lamas we had seen last year in the Kash valley.

The Regent was a lama, a living Buddha (' gegen ' or ' inspired '), about forty-two years old and a highly cultivated man. He had travelled much, but spoke no Turki. He played on the mandoline, sang and took photographs. The real chief was still a minor in 1929 and was about sixteen.

There were many of the well-to-do Kalmucks in the camp, and no one could have behaved more politely to me than they did. I used to visit their tents, which were furnished with everything from spring beds and gramophones to Burberry waterproofs and American revolvers. Yet, living next door to them, or loafing about the tents, were the common ruck of the Torguts, unwashed, uncouth and certainly very unlovely.

After a few pleasant days at the Gegen's headquarters, during which the subject of the stolen horses was discussed in devious ways, we said farewell and departed for Kucha. I had previously given various

presents, and when I left the wang sent me his. He gave me two horses for myself and four other horses to replace those stolen. I am afraid that, of all those animals, only one (or possibly two) were useful beasts, and the rest were not worth feeding. In fact they could not eat, being so old that they could not masticate their corn. I felt very sorry for Daulat, whose fine horse was replaced by a brute we subsequently sold at Kucha for two and sixpence.

I do not blame the wang as he had probably chosen decent animals for which others had been substituted, but it was no use grumbling and we really were lucky to get anything back at all.

The Regent sent with us a genial old Kalmuck with huge horned spectacles, as chaperon and guide. He did his work well, but in a couple of days he became homesick, ran short of kumiss, and implored leave to return. We had now crossed the river that traversed the great Yulduz plain and were approaching the mountains where the track was unknown, unmapped and unfrequented. I was not going to let the guide return home just when he was most needed, so I let him cry his eyes out, and he gave in. After all, I only asked him to do his duty.

We did the last march over the plain at great speed, as the green-eyed horse-flies settled on man and beast in myriads. We killed with one slap of the hand dozens of the brutes, which are the size of an English wasp. The maddened horses, laden though they were, went as fast as they could, and it was not till we reached the inner valleys that we had

any respite. I had wondered why there were no animals in the fine pasture that we traversed, but I soon discovered the reason when these brutes attacked the caravan.

We now set to work to cross the Tien Shan for the last time. As we entered the mountains we found the inevitable Chinese Customs post in charge of a very polite young Tungan, with whom we passed an hour or so.

There was a heavy haze—a feature of the Yulduz in the summer—so the mountains did not look their best. After crossing a plain thick with edelweiss and blue gentian the track grew steeper and became very rough, and we had to cross three passes in succession, of which the chief was the Til Ahmad. Here we let the old Kalmuck go, as he had carried out his task and we were now beyond his area.

These southern ranges of the Tien Shan differed greatly from their northern brethren. There was no forest on the side of the Yulduz, and little on that facing the south, where the grass was poor. Nevertheless, there was some delightful scenery, and the lake of Qarakul was charming. So, too, a few miles farther south, were the upper reaches of the Kucha River, where we camped under magnificent trees, with huge precipices beetling above us. The rock scenery surpassed any we had previously seen; and I should much have liked to spend some time there, but food was now running short and every one's face was resolutely fixed on the bazaar. I could hear the Turkis already discussing the pilau and dumplings they would

devour at the first opportunity. Besides, the melons were just ripe—a consideration that affected us all. It is all very well to scoff at these simple and sensible tastes, but the fleshpots and orchards of Kashgaria appealed to us strongly, after days of rain and meals that were monotonous and insipid.

We soon left the Tien Shan and reached the burning plains, and at length arrived at Kere Bazaar on August 4th, 1929.

CHAPTER XIX

KERE BAZAAR TO KASHGAR

We were clear of the mountains and there lay in front of us the journey to Kashgar and eventually to India. We had been to Kere Bazaar before. It is a place with a few shops and is the market for a scattered but fertile region below the Tien Shan.

The people were very kind and a welcome change from the Kalmucks. Whenever we met the Turki after being with the nomads, our consciences pricked us for our uncharitable thoughts and bitter remarks. We were given what we needed and usually well received, yet it was impossible to be enthusiastic over these folk. We always felt that there was nothing spontaneous about our reception, that fear and cupidity (and not fellow-feeling) were their motives. The truth is, the Sart is a colourless creature—a man of small emotions. He has no great vices—and no great virtues; he is petty in all he does. Though a persistent trader, usually in a small way, he is a poor business man; and if he tries any large enterprise, as a rule comes to grief.

The favourite occupation of a Turki is to collect a few donkeys, load them with sacks of rice or fruit, and peddle his wares through the country, generally

amongst the Kasaks or Kalmucks. He may be seen everywhere, leisurely moving along with his donkeys before him, going a few miles a day and those slowly. This occupation fills his time, both enabling the nomads to procure their supplies and the Turki to imagine himself a merchant of enterprise. Our destination was Kashgar, travelling once more by the beaten track, with a final visit of farewell to our friend the Taotai of Aqsu and to the hospitable Sart at Uch Turfan.

From Kere Bazaar to the main road was a long, dreary thirty miles over barren sai but enlivened by the prattle of a garrulous guide. He demonstrated the places of interest as he went along. A large hole was pointed out to us where a nugget of gold had been found, and on the excited finder digging deeper, mineral oil had welled up. Another unprepossessing watercourse was full of gold (for great treasures had been buried in it), but the Evil Spirits would not allow the treasure to be removed. And so on, until we felt that he was overdoing it all. He exuded folk-lore and local knowledge, of which much must have been sheer invention.

We reached Aqsu on August 17th. As we went through the fields and orchards of the district and then into the bazaar, we realised more than ever how lavish Nature had been and how generous. The contrast with the lean lands of the north struck us forcibly. The bazaars of Aqsu were glutted with the bountiful harvest. The melons, peaches, nectarines, apples, grapes, damsons and quinces overflowed the

stalls and spread out into the road. Vegetables were everywhere, from tomatoes and cucumbers to French beans and potatoes. Rice, flour, beans, peas, and the like, were abundant. The whole bazaar was one vast food-store of excellent quality at bargain prices. The pinched bazaars of India, the meagre shops of Mongolia, and the high prices of Europe all seemed remote and incredible before this accumulation of food, which was ever increasing as more and more produce poured into the town.

It was all eaten. The same Providence that gave all this bounty to the Turki sent with it a capacity for stowing it away that must be seen to be believed. We non-Turkis did our share, and thought we had played a man's part, but our efforts were contemptible compared with those of our pony-men, whose jaws never ceased from the good work. The bazaars were full of equally noble trenchermen spurred on by low prices and unstinted provender.

Nature indeed was extravagant, and under this overflowing cornucopia the beggars sat in squads amidst a cloud of dust and flies, munching steadily, absorbed in this heavenly opportunity for a real good gorge. The beggars at Aqsu were numerous and picturesque as well as being able-bodied and persistent. They form a regular community in most towns, and as they roam round begging, chanting their blessings delivered before their alms, they are attractive enough to the visitor, though a nuisance to the residents who have to support these sturdy rogues.

Mr. Ju, the kind Taotai of Aqsu, again entertained me to dinner—this time in his garden, for he was a real gardener. It was a comfortable discord of fruit and vegetables, lotus-ponds and trees, with long vistas of Indian corn and yellow asters, crops and flowers in happy disorder, blending pleasantly and forming a satisfying picture. My host loved his flowers. In winter he attended to them in a greenhouse—the only one, I believe, in Sinkiang—but it was in summer that he could indulge his hobby to the full. The garden was immense and there was not a single weed in it.

When we left Aqsu for Uch Turfan we found the river a formidable obstacle. It took us two hours and a half to cross the stream, which was a wide expanse of swirling water and concealed many quicksands which complicated our passage. We had, however, a good guide, but I was relieved when we reached the other side, as a mishap, with deplorable consequences, seemed likely to occur.

These rivers are a perennial nuisance in Central Asia, where bridges are almost non-existent. Indeed, it would be a great engineering feat to span these seasonal rivers, and tiresome though present methods are, they are quite good enough for the needs of the local traffic.

We now entered the richly-cultivated land of Uch Turfan, where the water was abundant but 'lacked strength,' so the people said, who attributed their anæmia to this cause.

We again stayed with the hospitable Abdul Qadir,

and his garden was a wonderful sight with its rows of nectarine and peach trees laden with fruit and the branches breaking beneath the weight. The greengages were incomparable, and the strawberry beds showed what we might have had earlier in the year. The pears, apples and grapes were equally abundant, and melons were innumerable. Most of the fruit lay rotting on the ground as there was nobody to eat it—every one seemed to have more than enough—and no means of preserving it. A bushel of nectarines, glowing red and luscious, sold for twopence. There was a special nectarine from Kucha, dazzling scarlet and of delicious flavour, and also a small early peach, which to taste was to love.

The Amban of Uch Turfan came from far Barkul and entertained me hospitably, but we were all so gorged and replete that we could not do justice to any hospitality. And so we had to tear ourselves away from this paradise, and take the hill road along the spurs of the Tien Shan to Kashgar. The haze was intense, more like a London fog than a late summer in the mountains, and the views were spoilt.

Our way lay up the Hare or Taushkan River, and we were soon in the Kirghiz country. The people were a poor lot and unlike their brethren in the Pamirs. They were deteriorating, probably because they were half-nomad and half-agriculturist and lived too much in the town. We met many with their eagles and hawks; they were picturesque enough, but their tents and their gear were of rather inferior quality.

We left the river and turned south-west into the

hills—at first below thin forests of spruce, but later over down-like hills, where we experienced difficulties over water. Our Kirghiz guide kept praising the women of his race. They were dear, costing as much as twenty or twenty-five silver 'shoes,' but as ten or fifteen 'shoes' came back with the girl's dowry in the form of gear, the net price was reasonable. A 'shoe,' or yambu, is fifty taels, worth seven to eight pounds sterling. He said that a Kirghiz woman made one tael do the work of two, and he pointed proudly to his clothes, all made by his wife. Felts, bags and hats for the men were all made by the women. He wound up by some very disparaging remarks on the Sart ladies, who did not know what honour and loyalty meant. We felt that he was a little hard on the latter, since, after all, the frequent divorces of the Turki were usually the doing of the men.

The yayeh was a disagreeable person with a goitre like an Elizabethan ruff, and had a nasty way with the local gentry, whom he treated to streams of abuse. The Kirghiz grovelled and cringed beneath these flowers of speech, and fed the brute with pilau and other luxuries. I am glad to say we were able to right matters before long.

We passed a small shrine in the midst of the plain. On asking whose it was, we were told that a female ibex had given birth to two kids, and that this unusual event had been commemorated by setting up poles and sticks with bits of cloth tied to them. This was clearly an embryo of a future place

of pilgrimage, and we wondered what holy man would be given the imaginary honour of burial in this centre of devotion.

On September 5th, 1929, we reached Kashgar and stayed with Captain George Sherriff at the Consulate-General.

PART II

THE SECOND JOURNEY 1930-1931

CHAPTER XX

KASHGAR AND KHOTAN

My next journey in Chinese Turkestan lasted from October, 1930, to October, 1931, and I entered the country by the Karakoram Pass. The road from Srinagar in Kashmir to Ladak has often been described, and an account can well be omitted here.

We arrived at the first town in Kashgaria, which was Karghalik, on October 5th, after a very wearisome, cold and dull journey, and proceeded to Kashgar where we were warmly welcomed by Captain Sherriff. My stay there was brief as I had left my caravan at Karghalik. Daulat and Abdulla were again with me; so too was Aziza, my melancholy but efficient Kashmiri cook, who passed his life crouching over a dung fire in some abandoned and heathenish upland. He always went to remote countries, and always regretted he had done so. Ali Khan came again, with the same ponies, as my caravan-bashi, and of course, Tihwa Ram, the dog, was with us. The old animal had spent the winter with Daulat in Gilgit, and it was a great joy to see him on the road once more. After leaving Kashgar I intended to take the road to Khotan and Keriya, along the northern sides of the Kuen Lun Mountains, and thence continue my journey to the Lop Nor region, which I had

failed to see on my last visit, or else to turn north from Khotan along the Khotan River, which flows through the desert to join the Yarkand River near Aqsu.

We returned from Kashgar to Karghalik in one of the wide arabas, or carts, that are made for the traffic to the north. These carts do not fit the ruts of the road to Khotan, where the loads are lighter and the axle-tree is consequently narrow. The result is unpleasant for the passenger who, already resigned to the discomfort of a rough journey on an unmade road in a springless cart, finds that his miseries are much increased by the fortuitous hiring of an outsize vehicle.

The owner was an agreeable youth of the irresponsible and feckless Turki type. He calmly announced that on arrival at Yarkand he was going to sell his cart and horses, his sole means of livelihood, and spend the money in a gay time, and also—to do him justice—on food for his parents, who were hard up and had not enough to eat. We argued with him vigorously, and asked how he would earn his living. Abdulla told him sarcastically that he had far better sell his father, a remark the lad took quite seriously, saying it was impossible to sell him as they were fond of one another. 'Indeed,' he added, 'my father wept when he saw me off, and wept bitterly,' which was true enough, for we had seen the sad farewell. So we left him at Yarkand, that paradise of the gourmand, eating as though he had never had a meal before. In the easy sensible fashion of the country we took his cart and horses on to our destination. We again visited Posgam, the dirtv

town of the big goitres, and learned at last why its inhabitants were so afflicted. Apparently in bygone times that holy man, Shah Wali, came to Posgam, and the unmannerly folk killed and ate his camel whereupon the indignant saint cursed them, declaring that their punishment should be that they should be afflicted with goitres the size of his camel's hump. And so they are, and though the hump is that of a small-sized camel it is large enough as a measure for a goitre.

As we rumbled along the unmade track in the pleasant eastern way, indifferent to time, clocks, or the tyrannies of definite engagements, we admired the country, particularly attractive after the stony expanses of the Karakoram. There was the mellowness of late summer spread over the ripe land, basking under the warm sun. The leaves were turning, and the fluffy seeds of the clematis, the wild grape of the Turki, wreathed the hedges like white roses. But the haze was too thick to allow the Kuen Lun to be seen, and all we saw to the south was an unending line of unimpressive barren hills, squat and thirsty in the yellow dust. The big peaks never appeared. We picked up our caravan at Karghalik and continued on the road to Khotan.

The melon season was now in full swing, and everywhere were thousands of melons and on all sides the gentle rumble of masticating jaws. The crescent rinds of the slices are given to the donkeys to eat, and the seeds are plastered against the walls of the house for use next year.

We passed Guma and Pialma, towns deserving

of honourable mention, for their melons were admirable beyond all human expectation, whereas in the Khotan district we were surprised and grieved to find the melons well below the average in flavour. This time we travelled by way of the large town of Qarakash, a trading centre one march from Khotan, but although the chief place of an important district it was sadly tumbled down and ramshackle, and seemed to consist of miles of bazaars all locked up for six days in the week and very busy for one.

We arrived there on a lovely day in November, a really warm late autumn day, and on the night of our stay we passed straight to winter. The temperature dropped twelve degrees, the leaves fell off the trees with a flop, and although the day dawned bright, the cold was great and the whole face of the country was transformed. As we rode through the now empty fields, we saw on all sides the millers standing by their mills, blowing clumsy horns of wood or earthenware to inform their customers that the mills were working. From the adjacent houses the women were hurrying with their grain in cloths or in calabashes to be ground. Passing many paper factories, we reached Khotan, and stayed with the British Aqsaqal, Badr-ud-Din Khan, well known to European travellers.

I have never cared for Khotan, although other visitors have often praised it. My men, too, shared my dislike for the place, and although we stayed there several times, we never found any attractions whatever. On this occasion everybody was ill, and I was importuned day and night for medicine. Once

indeed I was urgently called to see a woman only to find the poor creature had been dead for hours. Daulat became very ill here and needed all my attention. The Chinese officials at Khotan were very courteous, but I am afraid that even after many attempts I was not able to accustom myself to their food, though it consisted of rare and expensive luxuries.

From Khotan, now that Daulat was recovered, we went onwards to Keriya, passing Lop Bazaar, one march from Khotan and the centre of a large district in which many carpets are made. The modern Khotan carpets have been previously mentioned, but further enquiries for good local ones failed to produce any worth buying. No doubt the modern sorts serve their purpose. They are cheap, bright, and on the whole serviceable, and their patterns are popular.

It was a flat and rather uninteresting road to Keriya with some long stretches of desert and indifferent water, so much so that sometimes it was hardly possible to find enough for our party. We noticed that the graves were of an unusual type, as the custom was to dig a long deep wide trench, on both sides of which two tiers of graves, one above the other, were excavated in the face of the sides of the trench. The graves on top were small and intended for children: those below for adults. A mud wall was built evenly and neatly over the face of the excavated ditch in which were the graves, and orifices were made in their face, rather like large pigeonholes. When a funeral took place, the body was

slipped endwise into the hole, and the mouth plastered up with mud: and when all the graves were occupied, the trench was filled in. The Turki name for this tomb was Shamago.

The village of Chira was famous for its melons, and rightly so for they were exquisite. It boasted, too, a large and much-frequented shrine of the typical Turki type. The tomb was in the midst of a graveyard, in a forest of poles, and an air of neglect brooded over it. There is always that curious indifference regarding their shrines which seems to distinguish these people from Moslems in other lands, and yet at certain times they flock to worship at the tombs, and treat them with an outward respect which does not extend, however, to repairs.

We met some amusing characters as we went along. There was, for instance, an old man in charge of the irrigation of ninety-five farms, and it was his task to fill all the tanks for the local winter supply of water. He was proud of his importance, observing, 'Ah, no one can get on without me. Not even the Governor-General could fill the ponds or water the fields without my help.'

Then there was a yayeh who had lost his wife a fortnight before. We deeply sympathised and were ready to respect his sorrow, even in a country where marital devotion is as rare as monogamy, but our kindly natures were sadly tried. The whole way, in season and out, the widower retailed the virtues of his lost one. How she packed the saddle-bag and cooked his food, and saw him a league on the road, and so forth. She was a paragon, and rightly

mourned; but we did object when we heard the same tale poured out into the ears of every passer-by. The tale grew in length. The tears, the sniffs, and other signs of grief grew too, and became even noisy. So our sympathy vanished, we grew bored, then annoyed, and finally ribald, and I fear my men talked about his dead wife in a most improper way to that sorrow-stricken man. But the extravagant lamentations finally stopped. No doubt this sounds very childish, but the roads in the plains of Kashgaria are weary ones and any diversion is welcome.

We saw many black and white woodpeckers, handsome birds which seemed quite at home, and which I have never seen in the north of the province.

Keriya was a flourishing town, but not an interesting one, and we returned to Khotan from where we intended to travel north by the river to Kucha.

Before we left Khotan we saw the dog fights which are held every Sunday during the winter months on a plain about three miles south of the town on the left bank of the Yurung Kash River. As we rode out, we found that most of the city were setting out as well, very keen on seeing the spectacle. Many hawkers were going to provide nourishment for the onlookers.

It was a curious sight to see the dogs, of every size, shape and colour, and all of doubtful pedigree and lineage, tied up under trees, one dog to a tree, and certainly looking most unlikely animals to fight anything. There was a huge assemblage of men and women and a vast number of small boys. The pedlars did well, selling chiefly melons, dried fruit

and nuts, and much quiet spitting of superfluous seeds marked the stalls and dress-circle as well as the pit.

A pious and stout Haji, known as the ' Dog Haji,' controlled the proceedings, a name which threw my Hunza men into uncontrollable laughter. A Haji is a man of some consideration in Mohammedan society. He has been to the tomb of the prophet at Mecca, a proof of piety or wealth, often of both. He is thus a hall-marked orthodox Moslem. Now a dog is not a beast of honour in Islam, rather the reverse, so that the term ' Dog Haji ' used indiscriminately and casually had, very properly, an extremely odd and ludicrous signification to my men.

The pious sportsman arrived late but the proceedings began without him. The dogs were dragged by their owners into the arena and went very unwillingly. The masters held their respective dogs each facing its opponent. The dogs were then loosed with a push, and the surprising part was that a really good fight ensued. We saw several combats, some fierce ones, but it was astonishing what little damage the dogs suffered. From the howls, marks, bites, and general scrimmage, one imagined that only the victor would survive. Not at all. The dogs five minutes later seemed as fresh as ever, and had clearly sustained no real injury.

CHAPTER XXI

DOWN THE KHOTAN RIVER

We were now vaguely bound for the north, but our ultimate destination was unsettled. It proved, however, merely to be Kashgar, which though unexciting was comfortable and friendly. We all knew that at the British Consulate-General we should find a warm welcome, and very pleasant it was to know that after the inevitable disagreeablenesses of the journey.

The town of Khotan lies between two large rivers some miles apart, which unite several days' march north of the town, when the combined stream is known as the Khotan River. When the snows are melting in the Kuen Lun, this river flows through the Takla Makan desert and joins the Yarkand or Tarim River south of Aqsu. I intended to follow the river along its course and eventually to reach Kucha.

We were not sorry to leave Khotan. We remembered it chiefly as the only large town in Turkestan without a hammam, or Turkish bath, a defect severely commented on by Abdulla and Daulat. This really was remarkable as we used to find a number of baths in even small towns, and the better-class Sarts often have bathrooms in their houses.

On November 25th, 1930, we set forth from

Khotan, pleased to get away. We even managed to shake off Karim Beg, the Yamen spy, who had stuck closer to us than a brother, and had furnished us with immense and indigestible quantities of false information, which we recognised at once as such.

When we left the cultivation, the track ran through open reed-covered plains known as 'tokhai,' which were allotted to various sheep-owners for grazing. Every tokhai had a name, often a very inappropriate one, and every one varied in size. Consequently, the local practice of measuring distance by these grazing areas was quite valueless. No traveller knew where they ended or began, and there was no clue at all to the distance. We were told, for instance, that to a certain langar, or rest-house, it was ten of these areas; if we had been told a hundred, we should have been equally as well off.

I remember this langar because an old miserably poor goat-herd was in charge. His responsibilities were slight, as there were no supplies, and the place was a bare building. The old man had one maize bannock to eat, which the yayeh demanded. It was at once given up and eaten. A typical Turki trick, mean in our eyes but perfectly normal in those of the yayeh and his victim.

On each side of the river there were extensive plains covered with scrub, reed and brushwood, which in India would have held quail, partridges and the like, not to mention lizards and small mammals, but here these wide spaces were empty of all life. In the first fifty miles we saw one hare and a few little birds. Often I have travelled for days in Turke-

stan without seeing a creature, except perhaps an embarrassed and lonely fly.

As we were approaching the junction of the two rivers after three days' march, we looked to our right over the immense broad bed of the Yurung Kash River, at this season an expanse of dark dry sand-banks with a small forlorn stream wandering now to the right, now to the left, of its vast channel. We met few travellers, but caught up a lad wandering in the vague inconsequential way that Turkis seem to develop on a journey. He was going to Kucha to try his luck in that metropolis, and possessed his clothes and nothing else, and had no idea what he would do on arrival. He was a shepherd and had herded sheep for a bai, or well-to-do man, for seven years, during which time he had received no pay, so he had left his master and his job, being tired of such treatment. In my foolish Western fashion I rather sympathised with this oppressed youth who had served so long for his hire, but Abdulla Beg would have nothing to do with such soft sentimentalism. He pointed out that the young shepherd's clothes were good, that his boots were new and strong, that he was well-nourished to the point of fatness, and that generally his master had treated him well and the lad was a fool of a Turki.

At last we reached a sibilant place called Koshlash, and found a poor langar in charge of a very old but active one-eyed Tungan soldier whose military duties were as sketchy as his uniform. Here was the confluence of the two rivers, and we gazed over a wilderness of sand unrelieved by water or by undergrowth.

In summer with the flood rolling down, no doubt the scene was impressive, but in the winter light it was but a sour dismal sight. It was bitterly cold, but wood was mercifully abundant and I had a noble fire blazing in my room. But I forgot one thing, the chimney was made of wood, so that in a short time the whole place was ablaze and a regular scrimmage ensued to put it out. There was a foolish originality in making chimneys of tree trunks.

This route north across the desert and close to the Khotan River is much frequented during the winter, and an illustrious Amban called Ching with true altruism built and maintained a series of langars and inns along the road. But he passed on, as even Ambans do, and his successor cared not a cash for the welfare of wanderers in the desert, so all the inns and rest-houses have fallen down, and as the winter is bitterly cold, the inconvenience is considerable. The travellers, being Turkis, made no effort to preserve and repair these shelters. We heard a sad story at Koshlash. The son of one of the soldiers there wandered off into the wilds and was never seen again. It appears that he was carried off by a jinn, as the boy's footprints were traced up to a point when they suddenly stopped. It is stated that the jinn pounced on the poor child and soared skyward with him. It should be remembered that there are many jinns in Turkestan, and the people are afraid of them, and never venture to interfere.

We now went down the broad bed of the Khotan River. For day after day we wandered first from one

side and then to another of the distant banks which were covered with fine wild poplars, tamarisk and reed. There were a few varieties of grass and shrubs, but otherwise the vegetation never differed. We saw one pheasant, two hares and a few gazelle, besides the inevitable crow. On both sides of the river was the desert just beyond the thin fringe of vegetation, though sometimes it pressed up to the banks of the river, and the sand-hills rolled up and hung over the bed as though ready to choke it. For the first few miles there was a mere trickle of water, but that soon stopped and our only supplies came from pools under the high banks, often miles apart and not too easy to find. They were frozen over, for the temperature was now nearly zero, and were full of dead fish jammed in the ice. These apparently got caught when the river subsided, and the heat of the pools, stagnant under a warm sun, killed them. They looked rather grim with their bellies upward, and were all of one kind, a species of carp.

On the whole the journey was pleasant enough, as the sun shone and the days were bright and clear, but a biting wind spoilt the genial day. Happily the cold nights had no terrors for us, thanks to the wild poplar, or toghrak, which was abundant, and allowed us to make huge bonfires. Scant justice has been done to this remarkable tree, one of the most valuable natural products of Turkestan. Its thick leaves furnish good fodder, and the wood is always dry, burns brightly without smell or smoke, and is not quickly exhausted. The tree is hollow and is used for irrigation channels, bins for flour, mortars,

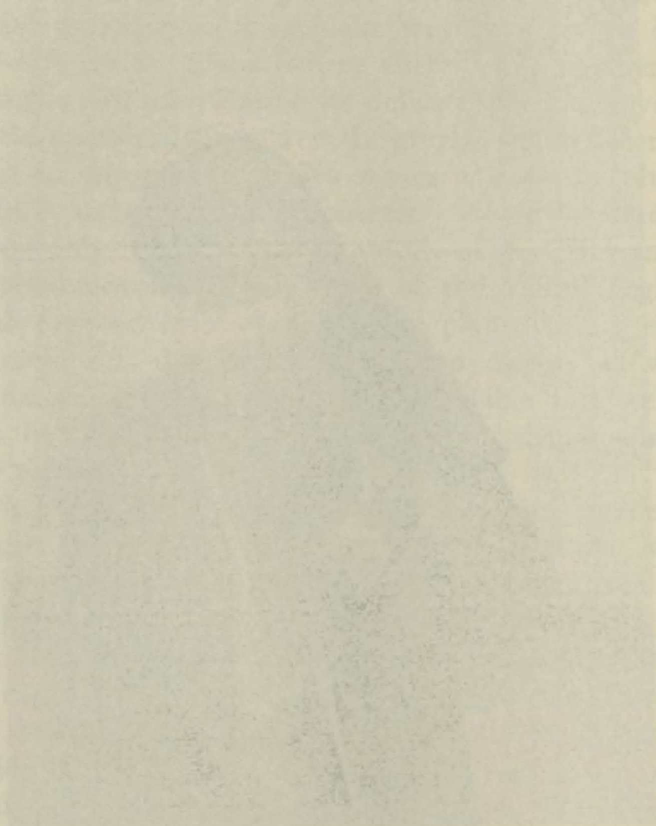
and even chimneys, as I had found to my cost at Koshlash. Its sap is taken as baking powder, and lye is made from the ash. The tree will grow anywhere, flourishing in some miraculous way on the tops of sand-hills or in places where there is no apparent moisture. In early spring its delicate emerald leaves cast the mantle of spring over the greyish yellow desert, whilst in autumn its golden leaves against the blue sky form an incomparable contrast. As we wandered on, the only break in the monotony of dry river and dryer wilderness was the ridge of the Mazar Tagh, which towered from afar over the plain like a great mountain but dwindled in size and dignity as we approached. The ruins of the inevitable fort were on it, but were not much more dignified than a squat little ruined post.

Here a lively incident interrupted our journey. Chaperoned and escorted by our two yayehs, we sought to buy a sheep and advanced, waving notes in our hand, to a patriarch of shepherds looking after a thousand animals. But he would have none of it, and rushed with another man at us. The old shepherd had an axe and his companion a knife, and the whole business was a bluff, successful enough on the timid Chanto but quite lost on the men of Hunza, who in a trice had taken the knife and axe from the two brutes, who implored mercy and asked us to accept the sheep as a present. The incident was trivial, but it threw light on the character of the Turki, who is a bully by nature as well as disobliging and unmannerly whenever he dares, and who always shows his worse side to his own folk; they naturally



A Turki Hawker

and even chimneys, as I had found to my cost at Meshhed. Its sap is taken as baking powder, and lye is made from the ash. The tree will grow anywhere, [illegible]



[illegible]

who in a [illegible] took the knife and axe from the two brothers, who [illegible] and asked us to accept the same as a present. The incident was trivial, but it threw light on the character of the Turki, who is a bully by nature as well as disobliging, and domineering whenever he dares, and who always shows his worse side to his own folk; they naturally

never imagined that we were anything but a party of Sarts.

After some days we arrived at a small settlement at the point where the river had left its old bed, and had carved out a new channel which now, of course, was quite dry. The inhabitants of this village, never a hard-worked body, were teaching their hunting eagles to catch their prey. Hares had been caught, and these were turned loose with a large 'brush' made of grass fastened on them, for foxes were the usual quarry and the device serves to teach the eagles. The poor hare had little chance of escape as the great birds half hopped, half flew, after them. When the hare is caught and killed the eagle is fed by its owner, but it will not release its prey until it has been hooded, when its master lifts it up and throws it carelessly on the ground before taking the huge brute on his wrist.

We followed the old abandoned channel of the stream as far as the great Tarim River. It was a depressing journey over the vast derelict river-bed, filled with dunes piled up by the wind. The islands, side channels, promontories and backwaters were all lined with thick toghraks and dense undergrowth and reed, but all were slowly, almost imperceptibly, perishing, for the lack of water was steadily making itself felt.

The people used to say that the toghraks were a thousand years old, and would take a thousand years to die, but they also admitted that the grazing was decreasing, and some families consequently left. The inhabitants of Turkestan are always being called on to suffer much from the caprices of the Turki

rivers which, in the welter of sand through which they pass, will change their course in a night and ruin large tracts of country. We found the Tarim River a wide, swirling, half-frozen stream, full of ice-floes, which prevented the ferry working till nearly midday. It took us a whole day to cross, and there was endless loading and unloading, which was chilly work and bad for the temper.

As we turned east and followed the left bank of the river, we saw how it broadened out, a great glittering sheet of frozen water winking in the winter sun. Large as it then was, its dimensions must be indeed great when the snows have melted and the flow comes down. The track was now difficult to find, none of us knew the road, and there were next to no travellers. So we made poor progress, as we several times took the wrong turning, but usually managed to keep near the river. The country was thickly covered with brushwood, broken by old canals, old riverbeds, and dried up backwaters, and we could see nothing on either side as we went along in the dense impenetrable tamarisk. There was a good deal of the sophora plant which has sweetish roots, and these were dug up by the hares, making large holes into which the ponies stumbled.

It was all a rather difficult business, as well as a little anxious, as after leaving the Tarim River the halting-place was a problem. We used to have the most ridiculous information from the few wayfarers we met. 'You want the Well of the Orchard, do you? Just round that corner.' So it was, but ten miles from the corner. Or again, 'You will soon

reach the langar and Well of the Dead Bitch. It is just as far as it takes to boil a pot of rice.' A very large pot, for it took five miles to reach that rest-house, which turned out to be in ruins and quite useless. So we finally invented a game of asking every one we met how far it was to the halting-place, and comparing the answers.

The fine toghrak wood was a boon all along the Tarim in the intense cold, and we made noble fires of it, and the trials of the journey were thus diminished. Yet all the same there was a kind of fascinating boredom in slowly travelling through these broad, dry, monotonous steppes, and it gave us almost a shock to come to the village of Monday Bazaar, and put up in a comfortable house. We were all dead tired, and fell asleep at once, and were quite unprepared for a visit of ceremony from the Amban at 10 p.m. I was in bed, but my caller was suspicious and sent his son to ascertain if the foreigner had really gone to bed at such an indecent hour. I would not move, though I really appreciated the courtesy but not the lack of customary notice. It snowed hard, so we stopped two nights, and I returned the visit next day, when I found the Amban in a room surrounded by all the revenue of the district, paid in copper cash. There were sacks of it, and the rate was then about forty copper cash to a penny.

The snow continued heavily as we struggled on to Kucha, where we spent ten bitter days. I again saw Fröken Engvall who was extrèmely kind and hospitable, but I felt it was lonely for her and that she should return to Sweden.

Near the inn I saw in a small cul-de-sac, exposed to the bitter cold (it was several degrees below zero), a poor blind beggar, covered with a jumble of rags. We did what little we could for him, but casual charity was not enough, so my men turned and upbraided the passers-by for their heartless treatment. They tried to run the Qazi to earth, they spoke their minds to the headmen of the quarter, and did their best to arouse fraternal charity in their brother-Mohammedans who must have hated these interfering foreigners. I am afraid it was all of little or no avail.

From Kucha we returned to Kashgar—a very wearisome journey for we had now traversed that route several times. The cold was severe, and it was no comfort to us to be told that the weather would not get warmer till the geese came from India.

CHAPTER XXII

SANJU, KHOTAN AND KERIYA

After staying a month at Kashgar, I left on February 22nd, 1931, intending to travel along the south of the province as far as Charkhlik in the east before turning north. I was anxious to visit the Lop Nor region, and to see a part of the country I did not know. Our road would be over the same ground as that already taken on a previous occasion as far as Keriya, but afterwards it would be along the unfrequented and sparsely populated region between the foot of the mountains and the desert—a tract of country not desert by any means, but undeveloped and awaiting the pressure of population to fill it. We varied the monotony of the road by striking across country from Kashgar to Karghalik, and omitting Yarkand. For a like reason we went from Khotan to Keriya by the hill-road, not a very attractive route in winter. We started in a blazing sun, but as usual the weather changed and grew dull and overcast. It is this absence of sunlight that makes the winter aspect of the country so very sombre. Everything is made from the loess soil—the fields and walls and houses—and as there is nothing evergreen, the land becomes a dreary monochrome, unrelieved and unchanging till summer really comes.

It was, again, the time when winter was going and the warm weather approaching, and consequently all the ponds and tanks had thawed, and water was now a problem. It was scanty and foul, for man and beast began to use the same supply which had been separately drawn before the thaw. We travelled to Merket, passing the Tarim oasis with the fine shrine of a Sultan's camel driver, a vindictive man even in death, since up to quite a recent date any horse that went near his tomb sickened and died. A little farther on was another ornate tomb of a kabob maker of the same ruler. A kabob is a goblet of meat cooked on a skewer, and it was but common justice for a King's 'Kabobchi' to be honoured as his camel man and cook had been.

The place bristled with shrines; we passed one of the sister of the King, another austere but holy person, who used to strike with blindness anyone coming near her tomb. Even larger than hers was one of another lady. Both these tombs were in groves of fine toghrak, part of the original forest which once covered the country. Besides tombs and shrines, the Tarim oasis was famous for its melons, and even at this time of the year, with their flavour impaired by cold and age, they were most delicious.

Tarim was fertile, but it suffered greatly from lack of water, the usual trouble in a country which, though wholly dependent on irrigation, suffers from a very haphazard system of water-distribution. The agriculture of the country will never be on a satisfactory basis

until the irrigation system is overhauled, and there is as much hope of that as of the Kasak ceasing to steal.

We again visited Merket where Tihwa Ram became very ill indeed. He had to travel in a cart—to the mystification of the Turkis who could not understand how anyone could hire a cart merely to carry a dog.

We went across country to Karghalik through well-tilled fertile land, where a good house, a fine orchard, and about ten acres of land could be bought for less than a hundred pounds. The people were not Doulans, but were quite the stupidest we had met, and a very simple question had to be repeated five or six times before they would answer.

Leaving the main road at Karghalik, we took the upper track to the south, under the Kuen Lun Mountains, an almost wholly desert route with halting-places at the small settlements situated where the streams issue from the hills. In most countries the rather dull détour over the sai, but under the mountains, would have been repaid by views of the snow peaks, but the haze prevented us from enjoying anything of the kind. Over the great stretches of glaring, gloomy desert, all we saw were the vague outlines of the mountains, like misty wraiths in the murk. Yet the sky was blue and the sun was bright, and this obscurity seemed quite wrong.

We met a donkey carrying two large, flat panniers, laden with live golden eagles which were being taken to Merket to be sold to the Doulans, who were keen hawkers and paid a good price for the birds, which

were all hooded and laid in neat bundles side by side. We were now fated to encounter many burans; not only was this the season for them, but they were particularly prevalent and severe in southern Turkestan. As the air of the plains grew warm and ascended to a higher level, the cold air from the mountains descended to fill the vacuum, and the extremely dry nature of the sub-montane districts of the Kuen Lun, where moister and heavier currents were unknown, made such storms unpleasantly frequent and severe.

It is impossible to travel much on the roads of Turkestan without meeting a class of wanderer characteristic of the country. Down the Khotan River, along the main road in the north, even in these minor bypaths, we met these migrants. They are always poor, usually quite harmless, and carry their few domestic belongings on a donkey or two. Often they are squatters who have been obliged to leave their holdings for a variety of reasons. Generally, however, they are more like gipsies, as they stay in a town doing odd jobs, plying a trade if they have one, and above all living on credit—a practice even commoner in Turkestan than in more sophisticated countries and with consequences even more disastrous to the lender. When these wanderers feel that they have outstayed their welcome and exhausted their credit, they steal away to some other town. Thus it is that parties of these roamers often pass one another, and we used to overtake them as they were either leaving or approaching a town. Apparently the Turki shopkeeper never succeeded in spotting

a bad customer, and so spent his life being constantly defrauded by these folk.

We reached Sanju after an interminably long march over low ridges, finally ascending to the crest of a pass about which the map was silent. From there we gazed down on the fertile valley, cultivated to its absolute limit, the fields and trees coming up to the very edge of the barren hills. A river of clear water, a rarity in those parts, flowed through the settlement, which was in charge of a Turki Amban who had completely adopted (doubtless wisely) Chinese ways. He was agreeable and intelligent, but suffered from such a complication of varying diseases that he taxed the capacity of my medicine-chest. He criticised his countrymen in the severest fashion, which is not usual amongst Turkis. At Sanju my caravan-bashi, Ali Khan, who had been with me for a long time, decided to leave me. Why he wanted to do so, I could not discover, and he probably did not know himself. He gave up a very profitable contract, but no one can reason with a Turki. In anticipation of leaving me he had been underfeeding his animals, and it would have been a slow process to recondition them, so perhaps it was just as well that he went. I was, however, sorry to see him go. He had served me well and had many virtues rare anywhere, especially in Central Asia, but there were counter attractions which would not yield to common sense or self-interest. Tihwa Ram was quite overcome with grief at Ali Khan's departure, for he was greatly attached to him for no apparent reason. We continued our journey with new pony-men and new

horses, and though good enough, it was unfortunate that the owner was not with the caravan, as the master's eye has a value in Turkestan just as anywhere else.

Our road was dreary and waterless as we wound over the stony foothills, and we saw nothing till we reached the Qarakash, one of the two rivers that form the Khotan River. Just before we reached it, the path ran through a long narrow valley with a stream of brine in it, and with amazing pillars of eroded clay, standing up like the battlements of a fortress. We had now reached the edge of the arable land of Khotan, where Captain Sherriff was expecting me. Unfortunately I had to halt for a week as Abdulla fell ill, so that by the time I did reach Khotan, my chance of seeing much of the Consul-General had gone. Luckily, we did have a day together, and begged the officials to leave us alone. Etiquette, however, is paramount in China, and visiting-cards came tumbling on us in sheaves, as though a dust-storm had blown all the cards in Asia to Khotan. With the cards came many invitations, brought by messengers sweating and salaaming, so we bowed to the inevitable and embarked on a futile round of hospitality. We felt quite as much for our hosts as for ourselves, but the dictates of punctilio had to be obeyed.

We left Khotan on March 23rd. Abdulla Beg remained behind as he was still poorly, and Tihwa Ram had gone with the consular party to Kashgar as his health was rather doubtful.

I had a Chinese boy, who had turned Mohammedan, with me, whom I had bought from Captain

Sherriff. His name was Jumah, and he was quite useful and remained with me till the end of the journey.

Our first objective was Keriya, a town of disagreeable memories, which we reached by an upper track. The country was much the same as that on the road to Sanju, with low barren foothills and little water, but the haze had increased in density and was now a worthy rival of a London fog.

It was a dreary progress as we almost groped our way in the fog. We passed Imamlar, the famous shrine of the four Imams, but it was disappointing as a spectacle, however famous for sanctity. As we reached it the fog lifted, and delicate white clouds fluttered in the blue sky, but not for long as a great wall of dirty brown vapour surged up, and we were again swathed in thick impenetrable fog. The famous shrine did not show to the best advantage, and we found it no better than its many rivals ; there was only a great bundle of torn dirty flags leaning drunkenly in every direction, like umbrellas in a crowded stand. A commonplace mud wall surrounded the actual tomb.

Another day brought us to the Keriya River, which we stumbled on so suddenly that we almost fell in. The river flowed between two narrow cliffs some 100 to 150 feet deep, but as we scanned the arid scrub-covered hillocks of sand there was nothing to indicate this rift. So we approached quite unsuspectingly to discover, a few yards from the track, the river flowing blue and careless at the bottom of a gorge of conglomerate cliffs. But the hills soon flattened out and the river broadened and sprawled

into the plain, becoming a shapeless object devoid of beauty. At last we entered the cultivation of Keriya and stayed again at the comfortable house of the leading British subject.

Keriya is a great grape-growing district, though not comparable with Turfan, and the trellises for the vines were a feature in the scenery. There were villages wholly given over to the grape where it was often impossible to buy even a small amount of corn for the horses. The melons were not considered good, and there was a shortage of water till late in the irrigating year, which made rice a difficult crop, and viticulture was therefore the favourite occupation. There were three hot months to ripen the grapes, which were dried and turned into raisins —large, sweet and good, but with too many stones. The small green sultana of Turfan was not grown, but the grapes of Keriya were equal to any grown in the province. It seemed a pity that more attention was not given to rice, as the water difficulty might have been overcome, and the demand for rice is insistent in Sinkiang. Probably one reason for its neglect was the work entailed by the vineyards, which engrossed the cultivators too much to let them look after their rice-fields properly.

It was pleasant riding through the tilled land with the apricot trees in blossom and the willow just out, and there was a touch of summer in the air. The farmers were all getting busy with their fields now that the silence of winter was broken. The men were ploughing and the women followed, casting the seeds into the freshly turned earth—a practice for-

bidden in many countries, since a female presence is taboo on such occasions. This prohibition exists even in Hunza and Nagar, where Hindu influences are absent, as well as in Kashmir and India.

The women here differed somewhat in dress from the women of the rest of the province. An unmarried girl buttoned her outer garment across on the shoulder: a young married woman wore a small patch of colour at the throat, while a middle-aged one had the right breast (and sometimes both sides) of her dress embroidered with coloured bands, generally green or red.

We saw a pretty girl driving a sheep, but when the animal misbehaved, the charming damsel opened her rosebud mouth and vented on the poor beast torrents of foul abuse that would have made a bargee blush.

Daulat rejoined me at Keriya though Abdulla and his nephew were still convalescing at Khotan, and I had been left in the hands of the new Chinese lad and the two Kashmiris. We had a peaceful time at Keriya, which is probably the purest Turki town, except Kelpin, in the province, lying as it does apart from the main stream of traffic. It is also the last town of any real importance, as the settlements to the east of it are little more than overgrown villages.

CHAPTER XXIII

TO NIYA AND LOP

We left Keriya on April 3rd to continue our journey along the southern road to Lop Nor which in former times had been a frequented trade-route but now was very little used. The truth was that the desert frightened the people, as it was easy to get lost and settled habitations were very rare. In the summer the heat, flies, mosquitoes and drought were even dangerous, not to mention the burans or dust-storms; there was, too, the lack of incentive. Political conditions in Kansu had also further contributed to the disuse of this track.

The first place of importance was Niya, a small modern settlement reached after a rather tedious stretch of desert. The people all declared that the fresh supply of water would come when the mulberries were ripe, and in the meantime we had to make shift with the putrid dregs of the winter's supply. In Turkestan the water is everywhere nearly always bad. In Kashgar it is brackish, in most places it is muddy, and only in the mountains is it enjoyable.

Here in the south the desert was pressing hard on the cultivation, and at Yes Yulghun, or 'the level

Tamarisk Plain,' I stepped out of my room into the desert which confronted me, and its sinister undulations of sand stretched for miles to the east and west and continued north till stopped by the Tarim River. The desert was a true desert with never a drop of water anywhere and with no brief season of scanty vegetation to give some relief to the eternal barrenness. I sympathised with the Turki loathing and hatred for this dry belly of their country, and appreciated their predilection for remaining, safe and soft, in their oases.

Niya's claim to fame rests on its nearness to the shrine of Imam Jafar Sadik, sixty miles down the Niya River to the north. It is little use being pleasant-spoken in Turkestan, so that when I found that the worst accommodation in the town had been prepared for us, I had to fly into a rage, for in Asia a remonstrance without a gust of temper behind it achieves as much as a cartridge without a bullet. The result justified the outburst, as we all adjourned from a small squalid hovel to a commodious, empty, and dusty house belonging to a beg who had fallen from favour and was hiding his diminished head in the mountains. There was a little dry garden attached to the house, in which a few fruit trees were blossoming. We started down the river for the shrine on the morrow, a blazing hot day. The track passed abundant water and many square miles of swamp, and when we entered the forest and thickets we were set upon by myriads of mosquitoes and regiments of active and unprepossessing ticks, which had

only just been unthawed and were anxious for a meal after their hibernation. The country resembled the riverine tracts that we had seen elsewhere and there was excellent grazing. The Niya River was not, however, a large stream—least of all in April when the water supply is particularly low—but it was a flowing river, though the current was too slow to overcome the tendency of the reeds to grow everywhere in it.

We did not know where to camp as the accursed ticks were ubiquitous. A shepherd advised us to pitch our tents on an old sheep-fold, assuring us that the ticks always went with the sheep and that we should find the abandoned folds without ticks or sheep. We did not believe him, but followed his advice and found that he was perfectly right. These shepherds believe that the ticks never attack people who abstain from milk, so none of them ever touched it.

This was our first introduction to the ticks who presumed sadly on it, and as we progressed eastwards from Niya we became engrossed with them; they were our daily occupation and staple conversation. The warm weather changed and a storm sprang up, bringing a steady cold wind that blew all night and stirred up the sand and turned the sky a lurid colour. We moved lugubriously onward in this atmosphere of sand and lowering sky. The muddy river, the shaking, moving sand-dunes, the dust-clogged vegetation, and the arid brittle grey tamarisk, overtopped by the angular often dying toghraks, became very

wearisome to us as we crawled along, wading hour after hour in the heavy sand. The country always looked worse during a buran—it could not well do otherwise—and these burans were almost daily afflictions. We were bored and dejected and our piety towards Imam Jafar Sadik melted away. I felt we had been harsh in our criticisms of the Turkis, for how could any people be cheerful or energetic who lived under a sandy pall of brown sky for half the year ?

On the third day we reached our destination. As we had now seen nearly every pilgrimage centre in the country we were prudent enough to form the lowest expectations of what we should find. But Central Asia holds the great charm of the unexpected. The path led to a large serai (qalandar khana) where pilgrims, indigent or otherwise, could lodge, but which was now occupied only by five or six of them from whom we fled. Beyond was a pleasant lake. Passing the ornate gate of the mosque with broken blue faience ornaments, we camped comfortably under trees by the water. Daulat caught fish, and the ponies grazed, while teal and other water-fowl flighted nearby. It was very hot and very agreeable to sit by the water, but we had to complete our pilgrimage. So we toiled under a blazing sun up a high sand-hill to the shrine, a square wooden building in bad repair containing a large white-washed tomb almost submerged in the drift sand. Behind was the inevitable huddle of poles and a few flags, while around were the graves of such

well-to-do persons as could afford to be buried within the sacred precincts.

The condition of the shrine was most unedifying and highly discreditable to the five sheikhs in charge of it, who fortunately for our pockets were all absent on their own unlawful occasions. After all, this was a great resort of the orthodox to whose piety it was no stimulus to behold their hallowed saint thus indifferently housed.

The pious season lasts three months during the autumn. The sheikhs provide nothing free, and do not now feed the beggars, who have to depend on the chance charity of the well-to-do pilgrims for a full stomach. The sheikhs' excuse is that in old days the revenues of Niya went to the shrine, but now they get nothing, except the alms of the faithful. The memory of Niaz Hakim Beg, a generous almsgiver, still lives.

Imam Jafar, long ago dead and buried and a canonised Moslem saint, still possesses fifteen hundred sheep which are herded by men who take what animals they need for themselves, and occasionally sell a few to visitors. The money thus provided goes into the pockets of the sheikhs and not to the upkeep of the shrine, so that the saint is cheated. These sheep are kept distinct from other flocks, and we saw the ecclesiastically owned animals being separated when they had become mixed with secular flocks.

We were pursued all the way back to Niya by a relentless dust-storm which did us a good turn in keeping the mosquitoes and ticks quiet. We found

that Abdulla Beg and his nephew Akbar had arrived, and I was glad indeed to see them. We left the place dry-eyed, but not so the pony-men who wept to leave a bazaar and plunge into the unknown desert. It was natural enough, and I should have felt the same in their place. We had a new and very small white dog with us, Niya by name; otherwise we had no dogs at all since the lamented departure of Tihwa Ram. We passed two large rivers, the Yartungaz and the Endere, but they irrigated very little country. The latter was especially impressive as it flowed in stately fashion through cliffs fifty or more feet high, and at the foot were ample springs and excellent grazing. The river wound in the most extravagant bends through a plain, arid indeed but furnishing pasture to many sheep. At one halting-place near Endere we were entertained by the antics of a man who called himself the master of the river. He was bursting with self-importance, and demanded extravagant prices for the skim milk, skinny hens and lean sheep he brought us, calmly declaring that as our boxes were full of money, we could easily afford eight or ten taels for a hen. We were not to be bluffed and paid a reasonable price. Next day he was delighted with a present of one tael and a small penknife.

Not far from Cherchen, in a very unattractive place, we were smitten by a buran akin to that which had afflicted us two years ago at the Algoi Sai near Toksun. This time we had a guide, and managed for twenty miles to grope our way through sand-dunes

and dry clay flats to the halting-place, which was a small well of brackish water in the middle of the desert. Here we stopped and huddled together with our backs to sand-hill and gale, praying and cursing, after flinging the loads off anyhow. It was bitterly cold and the raging wind chilled us to the bone. As the day went on the storm roared louder and louder, the air was thick with swirling clouds of orange dust, and so it lasted till midnight when the wind began to drop. We had started at 4.30 a.m. to avoid the heat of the day, but instead had spent it shivering with cold in spite of our heavy sheepskins.

We had with us an old Pathan whose donkeys we had hired to carry our horses' grain. I felt it incumbent on me to employ a fellow-subject where possible, but my patriotism was not rewarded. The cunning old man, known everywhere as the Great Mullah, a term at once of ridicule and respect, used to feed his donkeys on our corn, so we deducted the value at Cherchen. What he did not know about things was certainly not worth knowing. We suffered severely all the way from ticks. They used to live in the bark of the toghrak trees and also amongst the tamarisk, and sallied forth to enjoy the sun and devour what they could. It was horrible to see the brutes hanging black and gorged, like foul damsons, from the horses' flanks, and it was marvellous how they moved unerringly on their prey. Every few days we removed them and buried them, but it was a nasty job, and hardly worth the trouble, as others

at once took their place. The ponies seemed to suffer no inconvenience from the vermin.

We entered Cherchen by an avenue of fine poplars, but found the bazaar disappointing, although the place was a growing town with abundant land and water, and signs of new cultivation on all sides. The drawback was the cold climate, and the fruit especially was poor. Nevertheless, the poplars were well in leaf, and the fields brilliantly green with lucerne, and the growth of the trees struck us as unusually good despite the low temperature. It was April 20th and snow fell during our stay, but it must be remembered that the mountains were very close, which explained why the climate was severe in winter. The only manufacture of Cherchen was a black and red numdah of an effective pattern.

We had been trying to buy donkeys ever since we left Khotan, and were always told that the next town or village was the best place to do so. First we were referred to Keriya. At that town we were bidden to wait till we reached Cherchen, famous throughout the country for donkeys, so we were assured, and there we were promised what we wanted at Charkhlik. It was all done to save trouble and fuss: it was so much easier to fob off the stranger than to rummage round for reluctant donkeys. We did, however, secure a good dog, which we much needed. We left Cherchen on April 28th and the usual buran blew daily. We saw a good deal of the Cherchen River, a really fine stream even at a time when the water was lowest, and for days we traversed a region

of swamps and backwaters. Often the black mud of the swamps smelt strongly as the wind blew in our faces, but at times these expanses of high reed, swaying in the wind, with a rippling rhythm, yellow-brown against a blue sky, were very beautiful. Toghraks were numerous enough, but this was pre-eminently the land of reed, more so than any we had seen before. The river held ample water to ensure the swamps and lagoons remaining full, and fresh areas were often flooded, as was shown by the new and smaller growth of reed. The old reed of the previous year still dominated the young shoots, but in a month or two the colour of the lagoons and marshes would change and the whole country brighten in consequence.

Little as had been the traffic up to Cherchen, there was almost no traffic at all east of it, and a few grass lean-to huts were the sole accommodation for travellers. In these huts were runners who carried the official mail-bag for the Amban at Cherchen, and certainly earned their meagre pay, as the stations were often twenty or more miles apart. These men told us alarming tales of the mosquitoes and horse-flies, and ticks of summer, but we had begun to see enough of all three to realise that there was no exaggeration in their accounts.

Our old Pathan had left us by mutual consent, and we had a new donkeyman, a most industrious fellow, whom we noticed collecting all the wool caught on thorn bushes and twisting it into yarn as he went along driving his donkeys and addressing

them quietly and continuously with strong well-seasoned epithets unfitted for gentle ears. There were duck in many places, but cartridges were scarce for other than potshots, and we killed few. Otherwise there was the usual absence of wild life.

At last we saw the welcome poplars of Vash-Shahri, a small but comfortable settlement, and we put up at the house of the headman, one of the original founders of the hamlet. He was a courteous gentleman and a veritable patriarch. He had seventeen children—ten had died—and possessed thirty-nine grandchildren. Indeed so patriarchal was he that there were more olive branches expected of both his own and his descendants' families. We were thankful to be at Vash-Shahri, and to escape a bad storm, which even in the headman's house was disagreeable enough. At noon it was so dense that I could not see to read, and after the storm the night temperature dropped 25° to 40° F.

When we left Vash-Shahri one of our host's numerous progeny showed us the road astride a fine Kalmuck horse. He was a very amiable fellow, and ate steadily for eight hours without ceasing. He was a simple soul too, never having been farther afield than Cherchen, and as he was accompanying his father to Mecca the following year, he was likely to be surprised and disillusioned after twenty years in an oasis five miles square. He sang to beguile us on the way, and sang well too, although he had to pack his food into his cheek, where it bulged like a quid of tobacco. He said that jinns

had been numerous and malevolent in the neighbourhood but recently had withdrawn. The recent storm had caused rain and even snow in the mountains, but had unfortunately only slightly cleared the air, so the hills were not really visible. There was jade, our guide said, in the hills, which was likely enough for it is found at Keriya as well as near Khotan.

On May 5th we arrived at Çharkhlik, marching twenty-seven miles in the teeth of a howling buran, and put up with an affable but depressed Kashgarlik. He and the other folk of Charkhlik had cause for their low spirits, as a large garrison was on the way to that strategic place to repel an invasion of Tungans.

The Chinese soldier is a difficult problem, and even more difficult to discuss, since he is popular neither with his countrymen nor with strangers; and in Turkestan, although the army consists almost wholly of Turkis, the same rule applies. The truth is that an undisciplined force is a menace, a nuisance, and an expense, and this is as true in Turkestan as anywhere else. So the people of Charkhlik were clearing out whilst the going was good, and we thought their example worth following, and only stayed one night. Although there was nothing of interest in the place, especially with this blight on it, Charkhlik possesses certain advantages. To begin with, the soil is probably the best in the province, the water supply might with a little trouble be increased, and the climate is said to be good, but these remoter districts of Sinkiang will never be developed until

the pressure of population becomes considerable, and at present that is far from being the case.

We saw Charkhlik under abnormal conditions. We could buy no meat, milk or vegetables; grass was scanty, and most supplies, even cloth, were very short. In happier times we were told that the bazaar was well stocked and moderately priced, but at the sound of the drum most of the shopkeepers had vanished.

CHAPTER XXIV

NORTHWARDS TO KORLA

We were now well into what is vaguely known as Lop, a region which begins at the Tien Shan near Korla and stretches as far south as the Kuen Lun. The nomenclature was so loose as to be unsatisfactory, but Charkhlik is not more than a few marches from Lop Nor itself, and we were thus in the real Lop district. The Cherchen River, now known as the Lop, flows into the lake, and has always been a constant and faithful supply. Our route was north along the courses of the rivers which turned south at Korla and thereabouts on their way to the wide depression that finally became Lop Nor. It was a country of abandoned river-beds, lagoons, new hastily cut channels, and in general a maze of derelict rivers and capricious streams. On our left, to the west, was the great desert of the Takla Makan, that grim spectre which shadows the cultivator like some evil spirit. On our right was more desert, which gave place later to the distant hills of the Kuruk Tagh. At Tikkenlik, too, we should again strike the same track as we had taken in 1928.

The track north from Charkhlik led over a barren plain of hard encrusted earth of which the salt-impregnation is so marked that the lagoons and streams

are pure brine. The plain was in many places flooded, and we were told it was impassable at times owing to the mud and local inundations.

We found the Cherchen, or Lop, river a clear, deep, swift stream which had filled many lagoons in its course, and had become slightly brackish. This river flowed directly into Lop Nor. We crossed it by a good bridge, and turned north leaving on our right or eastward the beginning of the depression which ended in the great salt lagoon.

We should have liked to stay for several days near the Lop River, as duck and water-fowl abounded and there was good fishing. Unfortunately the saline influence had almost killed the reed, there was no grass, and it was not therefore possible to feed the ponies. With an army coming towards us and a fleeing population, the wise course was to retreat, though it was much against my wishes, but it would not have been prudent to continue in the country or to extend our wanderings. We shot a few duck, and Abdulla's nephew, Akbar, swam into the stream to retrieve them, and found the water very cold.

We soon reached the Tarim River, once a noble stream but now quite dried up. We gazed down on a great river-bed of soft sand with high banks and a few puddles here and there. I have already explained that as the Kuruk Darya or Dry River flows once more after a thousand years of complete dryness; the Konche River to some extent, but the Tarim River especially, have lost their supply of water. The farther south the River Tarim went the dryer it became, as the surplus trickle that reached it after the

Kuruk Darya had taken its fill could not gain the end of its course ; still less could it supply the Lop Lake, where in 1930 a little water had come through the Tarim, which had ceased to flow, as a real river, about 1925. We had to dig a well to find our water and managed to get enough.

As we wandered north along this interminable dead river and saw the harm wrought, we sympathised with the people. The water supply of a vast area had completely vanished. In many cases the villages were derelict and ruined, in others the people were still there. 'What can we do ?' they said. 'Our cattle and sheep are all here, and we should fare badly elsewhere. We are gradually eating our cattle since our fields will not bear, but, please heaven, the water will return. The land is fertile, God is merciful, no one cares, and we are helpless.' It was a lamentable and serious situation for them. They blamed every one, but the fundamental cause was the return of the water to its old original bed, and nothing but its deflection back again to the Tarim could save the country.

These Lopliks were decent folk, and had done all they could do. They had dammed up and hoarded every drop of water that dribbled or trickled into its former bed ; they had twice collected together to turn the water into the Tarim, but the task was beyond them. They saw their fields dried up, their pastures dying and their cattle decreasing, and no one lifted a finger to help them, exactly as they had complained to us.

Abdulla and Daulat said that they were ready to

undertake the task of bringing the water back to the land, and I believe they would have done it. The outlook for the Lopliks was not promising, as the whole area would certainly become depopulated unless by some happy chance the fickle water again returned to the Tarim bed. As we went on the weather became hotter, and the absence of shade was felt, for the only trees were the toghrak and a few stunted oleasters, whose almost blue leaves contrasted sharply with the brisk emerald of the new foliage of the poplar. Camping was pleasant enough, as we had now abundant water and wood, with grazing for the animals, but it was trying work stewing all day in the heat and glare. The fish would not take, and the wild fowl were far away in the middle of the swamps and quite unapproachable. They were plentiful enough—geese, duck, teal, herons, cormorants, divers, and waders of several kinds, terns and the like, but specially abundant was the ruddy sheldrake, the Brahminy duck of India, an ubiquitous bird from which there was no escape.

We were now in the wide area below Korla with immense lagoons ; broad stretches of river and endless, limitless swamps, screened with billowing acres of swaying reed. It was a paradise for the birds, but the man with a gun stood no chance. Abdulla and Daulat would plunge about in the sloppy ooze, striving hard for potshots for the empty pot, but with slender success, many falls and much bad language.

And so at last we came to Korla, having come all round the Takla Makan desert, and it is possible to review the country.

There are several noteworthy points. First, the monotony of the whole area must be almost unequalled. It was not a case of a great desert or level prairies or any natural feature necessarily unchanged. On the contrary, there were fine rivers such as the Cherchen and the Endere; there were mountains, often hidden, with foothills much in evidence; there were towns and villages; and yet the impression gained was one of complete uniformity. The landscape at Niya was the same as at Charkhlik, three hundred miles on, or at Tikkenlik, two hundred miles north. It is no exaggeration to say that other places nearer Aqsu or Kashgar were not very different. Day after day there was the same vegetation, useful and adequate, but identical and unrelieved. The extraordinarily small range of the Turkestan flora has been little discussed, and it was only when we had travelled hundreds of miles on end that we realised the lack of variety. We saw two trees, the wild poplar and the domestic one; a few large shrubs or small trees such as the willow, oleaster, tamarisk and thorn; few bushes, few plants, much reed, and little real grass. Yet it would be unfair to call the country ugly or uninteresting. On the contrary, there were scenes of real beauty by the lagoons and backwaters and rivers. The colouring was frequently fascinating, and the play of contrasts with the few colours available was the more remarkable by reason of its simplicity.

Then the lifelessness of these pastures and steppes was strange. In a few places water-fowl were abundant. More often they were absent. Except for aquatic

birds the wide pasture lands were empty, and a gazelle or a pig quite startled us by reason of their rarity. The small common birds did not exist, and the lesser mammals were absent.

This was not the monotony of the tropical forest with its unseen life and its very real if sinister fascination. These vast plains of Turkestan are neither desert nor forest; they are a nondescript region that eludes identification. They have no place at present in the economy of the land, but I believe that they are destined to be the settlements of the future when population increases and expansion is needed. Then places like Cherchen and Charkhlik and Niya, and the rivers Endere and Yartungaz, will enable new settlements to be made, or present cultivation to be extended, and southern Turkestan, now a byeword and a reproach, will by the ingenuity of man be a flourishing and fertile area.

CHAPTER XXV

THE YULDUZ

WE spent four days in Korla and camped in a pleasant orchard with good shade and water. The ponies enjoyed a rest, and needed it. The town, unfortunately, was full of soldiers, who were not an harmonious element, and the unfortunate Amban was the chief sufferer as he had to make all arrangements for them. The town was flourishing but the strain of supplying an army was beyond it, and I felt very sorry indeed for the official, who seemed a capable man with an impossible task. I was not sorry to leave Korla, as the summer was advancing and the mountains were beckoning to us. I intended to go to Qarashahr, thence up the Yulduz—much though I would have given to avoid it—and then over into the Kunges, which we had visited in 1929, and to attempt again to see more of the country at the head of the Kash valley and behind Manas. It will be remembered that our previous excursion there had failed through lack of supplies.

We again traversed the pretty gorge of the Konche River as we proceeded to Qarashahr, a town we had hoped never again to visit. Previously it had been winter, with a gnawing cold everywhere, the river frozen over, and the heaps of muck too. It was now

early summer, and the town was intolerable. Innumerable flies buzzed and swarmed in the garbage-filled streets, smells assailed us overpoweringly, and the town looked odious beneath the merciless glare. We had to buy horses at Qarashahr and managed to obtain some fine ones. As the tidings spread that we were buying, animals were led in by dealers, and great animation ensued. Money, I sometimes think, has even more power to galvanise a Central Asiatic into energy than food, and certainly on this occasion half the town brightened up and woke from sleep. The horses come chiefly from the great lake, the Baghrash Kol or Tengris Nor, and from the Kuruk Tagh. Those which come from the Yulduz proper are not so valuable.

The drawings of horses made in Britain a hundred years ago are often derided as anatomical monstrosities, but I think a visit to Qarashahr would change the opinions of the critics. Many of the horses there are exactly like those old despised prints. It is said that these Kalmuck horses came originally from Russia when the Mongols left that country some hundred and fifty years ago. Others say that a present of English blood horses to a former Emperor of Russia, and through him to a Mongol prince, is the origin of the present horses, which resemble nothing else in Asia that I know of.

The method of settling the price was interesting. After choosing a horse, Abdulla walked up to the dealer, slipped his hand inside the other's open and greasy sleeve, and pressed the dealer's arm in a certain way to signify the amount he would pay.

No one could see what the sum offered was, and it was only by looking at the grief and pain on the man's face that we knew that the price offered was too low. When the sad news had sunk into the Turki brain, Abdulla's arm was flung off, the Turki turned aside with a groan and a curse and slowly led the pony away till his hand was again grasped and the bargaining began afresh. Horse-coping is the same all the world over. It was an amusing business, and the horses were galloped up and down the main street to the intense interest of every one, for horses were one of the few things to talk about in the dirty town.

Our route was up the Yulduz valley into the heart of the Tien Shan and thence to Ili, but I hoped to reach once more the upper Kash, where I had been in 1928. We none of us looked forward to a return to the Yulduz, which is one of those disagreeable places which share with Qarashahr, Bai and others the quality of being unavoidable. So though we were glad to leave the flies, heat, smells and filth of the town, we turned unwillingly in the direction of the Yulduz. It was May 31st, 1931, and a blazing hot day. We crossed the wide, rather poorly cultivated plain, which looked ugly and untidy, and came to the winter headquarters of the Torgut Kalmucks—a large village, not unlike a series of barracks, with dismal one-storeyed mud buildings, quite well laid out, in the centre of which was the pleasant house of the Chief.

The Regent, and his nephew, the young Khan, had been very civil to us two years before in their summer quarters, and they seemed pleased to see

me. The uncle, the Gegen, spiritual and much-revered head of all the Mongols of Sinkiang as well as over-lord of those of Qarashahr during his nephew's minority, was full of conversation on a variety of subjects. Once again I contrasted the polished and attractive manners of this living Buddha with the very primitive habits of the bulk of his subjects. He supplied us with two guides and admonished them well, and we were surprised that they turned out useless and wholly neglectful of their duties.

We left after two days at the Chief's headquarters, where things were rather in a muddle as the migration to the uplands was beginning. After experiencing a furious storm we entered the low hills, the first off-shoots of the Tien Shan, and found the scenery fresh and gay. There were great bushes of yellow berberis, and the gorse was out in the side nalas, while the valley bed was full of willow and elm, with a clear stream flowing through. It was stimulating to be in the pure air with an unstained blue sky, and if the Yulduz had all been like this, we should have fared well.

The Kalmucks were everywhere on the move. The last migration we had accompanied was that of the Kirei Kasaks in the Altai, but this was very different, for the Kalmuck is an uncouth creature with his grease-soaked cap, dirty face and dirtier garments. They were people to be avoided where possible, and that was a nuisance, for in the wilds the troubles of the road are much accentuated when you have to avoid your fellow-passengers.

We nearly lost our small dog Niya, who had now

become a useful member of the party and had been stolen by a Mongol. We had quite given up all hope of recovering him, when by a lucky chance as we came down one nala we met a Kalmuck coming down another, and with him our Niya. The man was furious when we claimed our property, but all he received for his pains was a blast of sulphurous language, which he thoroughly deserved.

We wound up and up an interminable valley, which was picturesque with its cliff-like sides and sparkling stream. There was ample fuel too, but we grew very weary of the endless river crossings. We had the usual troupe of donkeys with us, laden with rations for man and beast, and they required a great deal of help, as the bed of the stream was stony. Consequently the men had to wade with the donkeys and support them during the crossings, and this needed time and patience. We went more slowly than the Kalmucks, who were unhampered by luggage-animals, except for the few carrying their tents and scanty gear, so we were passed by many parties, including some lamas with the image of Buddha riding alone on a pony and looking rather like a parrot cage encased in cloth. But at last the valley contracted to a gorge-like ravine; we ascended a down-like crest, the Kotyl Pass, and descended into the upper valleys of the little Yulduz.

We had seen that country before; we recognised with no affectionate remembrance those wind-swept uplands and bleak, exposed valleys, and gazed with disgust on the unlovely prospect. For there is little natural beauty in that smooth featureless landscape.

Behind us we could still see the warmer sides of a wooded valley; in front of us dark clouds threatened rain. We hastened down over the gentle grassy slope, and reached the flat, brownish, swampy plain of the little Yulduz, through which a river meandered sluggishly. The tents were just up when the rain came down in sheets, the first real rain we had seen for a year, and not appreciated.

The Yulduz proved as detestable as any place could be. Just as in 1928 we had been pursued by snow, so now we were by rain. We hurried the pace as much as we could over the monotonous, grassy, greasy flats. The rain poured every day so we were seldom dry. The wind blew and our tempers grew worse. It was the same perennial story of a journey in the Yulduz—damp and discomfort; shapeless, soaking lumps of dung for fuel; and nothing to be had to eat, and no compensations. The scenery was strangely commonplace in that curious Tibetan-like upland valley, which lay cheek by jowl with some of the finest Alpine scenery of the Tien Shan.

On all sides were low hills, powdered with fresh snow and hidden under sombre black canopies of cloud. At times the rain stopped, and the hill-sides were etched a deep indigo against the greyish-black wrack of cloud and mist. If a gleam of sun pierced the vapour it turned the smooth slope of the downs to the rosy purple of a Scottish heath-covered mountain. It was on such occasions that my dislike of the Yulduz vanished, and I felt almost in love with these harsh, inclement highlands, but I am afraid that these feelings were solely my own. My men

cursed the country and the people, and reviled the sun for not coming out from the bank of cloud to dry their soaking bedding, clothes and gear.

As a matter of fact, the struggle for existence absorbed us. Wet tents, smouldering fires, searches for a sheltered camp, or dry dung, attempts to boil the pot—these were our pre-occupations and cares. We saw practically no Kalmucks, as those amiable gentry were huddled half-fuddled in their dirty tents. If we had been amongst Kirghiz or Kasaks we should have found some cleanliness and comforts in the tents of those very tolerable blackguards.

The Yulduz is really a very singular place and offers a strange contrast to any of its neighbouring valleys. Its geographical construction is such that every storm sweeps unimpeded up its smooth shallow valleys. The grass is good, the water is ample, but the exposed nature of the country and its poor soil produce conditions which prevent anything growing. Even at Urga a few carefully tended vegetables survived only with difficulty, and its smallest undergrowth was everywhere scanty. In one or two very narrow well-protected ravines there was some willow, but so rare and so remote that the casual traveller failed to benefit thereby.

We passed Urga, the summer headquarters of the Torguts, where we sought in vain for the tented lamasery and the aouls of the notables. The Chief's house was empty, and the whole camp deserted except for the bazaar, a ramshackle place where some Chanto merchants were already established but were rather melancholy as their customers had not yet arrived.

We were able to buy flour which would have saved us something had we known of it in Qarashahr, but we dared not risk being stranded and had brought full rations with us.

On June 14th, 1931, we left Urga and crossed the easy Narat Pass in a storm of wind, rain and heavy hail, but we did not care as our faces were turned away from the Yulduz. We looked down from the top of the Pass on the rich blue pastures and welcome forests of the Kunges valley, and our hearts rejoiced. 'It is Paradise,' said the pony-men.

CHAPTER XXVI

BACK TO ILI

We had seen nothing of the two Kalmucks detailed to look after us, and I fear we did not miss them, as it is difficult to bother about people who consistently neglect their duty. They caught us up, however, in the Kunges valley, when no longer wanted, and were all tears and protestations. They finally left us, lamenting the reward their folly had lost, and we watched them dry-eyed as they went away.

We came again to the headquarters of Urus and Turus, where we had stayed two years ago, and were welcomed by the son of the headman. We had great difficulty in crossing the river to reach their tents owing to the high water, and I began to be disturbed by the reports of the difficulties I should meet higher up the valleys. A heavy storm drenched everything after we arrived, but we had plenty of wood, and endured it resignedly. We were well entertained by the Kasai Kasaks, to whom on arrival we handed over all our horses, and so freed ourselves from anxiety about them. Whatever the faults of the Kasak may be—and Heaven knows they are numerous—we found these nomads a pleasant contrast to the Mongols. After all, it is possible to eat and drink and live with them, and it would require

the stomach of an hyena and the hide of an armadillo to dwell intimately amongst the Kalmucks. It is done, I believe, but I often wonder how.

We crossed the watershed into the Kash valley, and found that the nomads had not yet entered the upper pastures, and so we had sole possession of the whole of the country with its deep meadows, unsoiled by man or beast. The contrast between the Kunges and Kash valleys on the one hand and the Yulduz on the other was indeed very marked. The rich lush vegetation was a delight, and the poor ponies revelled in it. We ourselves were contented, as we had abundant wood, and spinach, mushrooms and rhubarb to eat, but we could not induce our Turkis to touch any of these good things, except some wild onions which were new to me but seemed excellent. The weather was not so amiably disposed, and as I heard so many alarming reports of the rivers in the Upper Kash, I left the main camp and set out to reach the head of the valley. I had only gone one march when the rain began, and it continued without ceasing for four days. It was impossible to move as the tents were heavy with rain and the paths impassable; so I sat on the top of a hill with my camp a dozen miles behind until the rain lifted, and then I returned to it ignominiously.

I realised with regret that it was hopeless to attempt to travel in the remoter parts of the Kash valley, because the river was a constant obstacle. I could not cross anywhere to the right side of the valley, which could only be reached by returning almost to Ili and then retracing one's steps up the valley but on the opposite

bank, which meant a long détour and a waste of time. The advice I received was to wait six weeks—an impossible suggestion. The only course open was to go to Ili and make other plans, so very reluctantly we turned our backs on the fair uplands and our faces towards Ili, though I do not fancy that the pony-men were sorry, for already they could smell from afar the dumplings, stews and pilaus of the cookshops of Ili, and longed for a good meal well lubricated with linseed oil. As we descended we met the Kasaks coming up. They grumbled at having just been ordered to collect fifteen hundred horses by way of anticipated taxation, and were not at all comforted when I told them that they were lightly taxed. The Chinese take 2 per cent. of their animals and the Kasaks have really nothing to complain of.

I envied the free life of these nomads the more I saw of it; in their own ample areas they can go where they like, no one hindering. The drudgery of the artisan, clerk or official is unknown to them. They have no anxiety about crops and seasons, they are without concern for leaking houses or drains or rents. Early rising is unknown. They never walk, and take no exercise except on horseback. The urge of education, the useless complications of newspapers, wireless, investments, or the million contrivances which we in our simplicity call civilisation, are as unknown as unneeded. The life of the Kasak is to go skimming over the plains on his steed, rounding up horses, or collecting stray cattle. His tent is warm, his clothing ample, his belly full, and he lives a care-free, untrammelled existence, with his religion

sitting lightly on him. His amusements are horse-coping, love making, stealing, dancing, endless ceaseless talking, drinking tea or kumiss, and eating. It may not be a life of uplift and erudition, but it is a sane, simple, healthy existence. He is a tiresome fellow in many ways ; he has qualities which neither I nor my men appreciated, but he has his points, and, above all, economically he plays his part well. Without the Kasak or his brother nomads, the pastures would be untenanted, and immense areas of Central Asia would be valueless to man. Thanks to these gipsies of the Highlands, remote uplands as well as accessible plains are brought into the service of man.

As we went down the valley, we were offered the soft new horns of the wapiti freshly killed by the Kasaks. These horns have great medicinal value in the eyes of the Chinese and command high prices, but naturally were useless to us. The unhappy stags are harassed remorsely by the nomads when the horns are in velvet, and are being exterminated. The butchery is simplified by the possession of many rifles, which poured into Sinkiang from Russia at the time of the revolution.

We crossed the Kash by a bridge below the ferry we had used in 1928, which was a little longer but more convenient. There were no lamas this time near Nilki, they having apparently changed the site of their summer camp. Here we halted for two days, as the heat was considerable and the ponies were rather done up. Two of our horses were promptly stolen by a Kasak, thanks to the folly of the Turki pony-men, who had not grazed them where

they had been ordered. By means of a friendly Kalmuck, deputed by the headman of Nilki, we managed to rescue them, but it was by the merest good luck.

The heat was very great, and especially trying after the cold of the upper valleys, and the long march of thirty miles to Mazar was tiring; we therefore stopped with the same hospitable Taranchis who had befriended us three years ago and who were delighted to see us. I again visited the shrine, the tomb of Sultan Wasih, known locally as Weis, and thought that the magnificent poplars and elms in the grove round the building were more impressive than the Chinese-like structure itself. Near the tomb of the Sultan's mother there were many offerings of women's hair, including a bag of black tresses.

The Ili valley looked as unkempt as ever, and contrasted unfavourably with the neat cultivation of Kashgar and the south. The untidy ragged fields, the weed-filled crops, the ruined or abandoned houses, were most unattractive. I have already referred to this curious feature of the Ili valley, that fertile district inhabited by a dozen hostile races who all seemed to be staying for a few days only, judging from the makeshift way in which they lived. No doubt the past history of the district had been a stormy one, and the Russian occupation and subsequent evacuation had shaken the confidence of the people. Disturbances in the past, the unsettled state of Russia, their near and rather undesirable neighbour, had increased the natural instinct of the people to return to their own homes. This they never would do

although they always talked about it. It was difficult to know what the name of our destination was. If we asked how far Ili was, we were told that we should reach Kulja in so many hours. If we asked after Kulja we were told about Ili.

It was dull hot work reaching that city, and we were glad to arrive on July 6th. Thanks to the kindness of the Rev. Theodore Hufnagel we managed to find excellent quarters in the new Russian quarter of the town. The house, like its fellows, was built on approved Russian lines, which seemed to be as unsuitable as could be imagined. It was the practice to build close to the roadside, on which most of the buildings looked out. The occupant accordingly enjoys a maximum of noise, dust and publicity, not to mention the inconvenience of people looking and climbing through the window and even throwing things into the rooms. To prevent such happenings at night, the ingenious Russian fixes iron shutters on the outside, which, though clumsily secured within, can be opened with the help of a good file from without. The burglar would be quite undisturbed at his work, or if he preferred he could wrench the flimsy bar from its wooden socket. It is inexplicable why houses in a windy, dusty, country should be thus situated, or, seeing what public security is, built so insecurely. The natives, who copy the Russians in most things, are not so foolish as to build houses with windows on the street.

We spent a pleasant time in Kulja, but the flies were incredibly numerous. Bread was very cheap, good black beer fourpence a dozen, but meat and

vegetables dear. The town had grown considerably, but not in beauty, and my men thought it was decidedly dirtier. Russian goods were plentiful, and there was an enormous godown crammed with every sort of Soviet product, from carriages to vinegar. The prices of these goods were by no means low as there was no competition to contend against, and the quality and variety uniformly poor.

CHAPTER XXVII

ACROSS THE TIEN SHAN TO BAI

We left Kulja on July 13th. We were tired of the flies, which made life almost unendurable, but we regretted the good black beer which my Hunza men enjoyed, and our Turkis were equally sorry to leave the dumplings and puddings of the town. These dumplings in particular are not half-bad, and are cooked by steaming in sieves placed one above another. I used to order two or three hundred of these meat dumplings on arrival at a town, and give them to the men after stipulating with the cook that proper meat should be put inside, and not the rind of a horse's hoof with a piece of onion, which often seemed to comprise the contents. It sounds a huge order but the dumplings were small, and it was like feeding a crocodile with chocolates, except that the attention was appreciated, as free food always is acceptable. We were now bound for the Tekes, and then across the Central Tien Shan by an almost unknown route to Bai. The Tekes is strictly speaking a river, but the name is given to all the district through which it flows—a vague comprehensive name which serves a useful purpose in a country where distinguishing names are so rare. We crossed the Ili River just below its junction with the Kash and Kunges, tearing

down-stream in the ferry-boat in the usual mad haphazard fashion peculiar to ferries in Central Asia. We then proceeded to cross the range of mountains between the valleys of the Tekes and the Ili, at first over an arid plain with scanty vegetation but alive with thousands and thousands of black crows. We then entered a grassy nala which meandered along pleasantly enough but with little water, and an absence of trees. We were passing through the eastern and lower part of the Ili Mountains which rose high and even commanding on the west. We then descended another long grassy nala, very narrow and seemingly endless, and after passing a large but almost ruined Kalmuck monastery we reached the broad and unfordable Tekes River. Here there was a village, and we were presented with two sheep. We ate one and kept the other, and the choice was a most happy one. The new sheep, called Li Darin after the donor, took charge at once of the entire caravan. He marched at the head of it, a proceeding which at once marked him out as an unusual animal, as sheep detest going anywhere alone and usually have to be dragged along ignominiously. Thus it was that Li Darin joined our party, and for five months till we reached Hunza, the little beast accompanied us, an affectionate, amusing and intelligent pet.

We crossed the Tekes by a good bridge, the speculation of an enterprising Kashgarlik, who, finding there was great need of a bridge, had built one, and spent his life sitting beside it collecting the tolls. His trouble, however, was the refusal of quite a number

of the users to pay anything, and it was only when Heaven sent a caravan such as ours that the Kashgarlik did not regret his speculation. We now plunged into the valleys of the Tien Shan, and very hard work it was. There was once again the old necessity of going up one valley, crossing over into the one adjoining, and then back again into the first, and so it was by this crab-like motion of advance that we found ourselves at Burul amongst the Ming Murat Kirghiz. These were the only Kirghiz anywhere north of Aqsu, or indeed in the Chinese Tien Shan proper, as all the Mohammedan nomads are Kasaks. It appears they had once been in large numbers in the Ili district but had unwisely withdrawn with the Russians, only to be compelled by lack of grazing grounds to come back to find most of their lands occupied by Kasaks.

We were sorry to leave Burul where the Kirghiz headman had nobly entertained us to a feast. I went for the feast to his tent with Abdulla and Daulat —the Kashmiris were bad ' mixers ' though possessed of other virtues—and after the usual compliments and conversation, a sheep was brought in and shown to me that I might know it was a good one. It was then killed and skinned and put into the pot, and the head, after being carefully singed, followed suit. All this was done in profound silence with the Kirghiz watching every movement with a close scrutiny. While the sheep was cooking, we sat on the ground on rugs in the tent, drank tea with plenty of salted cream, and ate bread made like a bun and cooked inside a circular iron pot. Outside the rain poured

steadily down, but we were comfortably reclining in the tent, which was warm, draught-proof and dry. The fire burnt briskly, and the pot sizzled melodiously. First of all pieces of the breast were cut into flat steaks and toasted on a wooden skewer, being well basted meanwhile with butter spread with the palm of the hand. It was then cut up and handed in neat little gobbets to Abdulla, Daulat and myself. We chose a few and passed the remainder to the Kirghiz.

When the boiled mutton was ready, it was placed on large flat dishes in front of the circle of guests, with small bowls of salt water at the side. Perfect silence prevailed, broken only by the dull crash of a well-gnawed clean-picked bone, tossed to one side of the tent, and by the rhythm of jaws munching well and truly. The servants sat together in one part of the tent and ate the more second-rate pieces of the stew, and Sultan, our host's small boy, skilfully manipulated the chops, and worked away like a little terrier at the marrow-bones. When the mutton was finished, the bones were collected and given to the dogs. Excellent broth was then served to us in bowls. We lay back comfortably gorged, a whole tentful of us, and we belched melodiously, since Eastern etiquette requires such appreciation from the guests.

Tea and kumiss were again offered, but we refused politely and withdrew. So passed an agreeable afternoon. The hawk fluttered occasionally in a corner of the aoul, the skin of kumiss was stirred with its paddle occasionally, the headman chatted, but movement was reduced to a minimum.

We crossed from Burul over the Pass of that

name and descended to the Agias River. It was not an easy day, as the Pass consisted of a glacier lightly covered with snow, and full of crevasses, just large enough to trap a pony. We had a struggle to reach the top. All our loads had to be carried on our backs, and the ponies constantly fell into a crevasse, out of which they were hauled only to fall promptly into another.

The view from the top was superb, as we had a perfect day and could see over the many unknown, unnamed giants of the Tien Shan. Our Kirghiz followers produced a large skin of kumiss to refresh us, and it was indeed welcome to the sweating, tired men. It never agreed with me—to my grief and chagrin.

The descent to the Agias River from the summit of the Pass seemed interminable. We went on and on, over spurs and ridges, down precipitous paths, the tired men cursing and the animals stumbling. All wanted to stop, but I refused, as without fuel that would indeed have been folly. The last two hundred yards were very rough and steep, and the animals were quite worn out. The poor creatures fell and the loads came off and had to be carried down by hand. But at last we were encamped by the river, with fine fires of driftwood, and were soon asleep after a long, vexatious day.

We moved up, after a rest, to the head of the Agias, and spent as long as we dared there, having regard to our supplies and the danger of snow on the Passes. The scenery was superb, and so too were the flowers, especially the gentians. The weather, however, was unpropitious. The clouds would collect

near the glaciers, and come down in drenching rain, sweeping along the broad, open valley like a waterspout. There seemed to be no end to the rain, and an old Kirghiz cheered us by observing that if it is fine for one day, it will be wet for three, and if fine for three, it will rain for seven, and I do not believe that he exaggerated things.

We had now to continue our journey to the south, which meant crossing endless Passes. Our first Pass on leaving the Agias valley was easy enough, but we knew from experience that an easy Pass is a snare, and we were right. Before us were two spurs, and both were awkward, but one was like the wall of a house. We went up a narrow, steep, stony chimney, rough, precipitous and, as it proved, highly precarious. The loads went bounding down, and the ponies too, and I often gave up the animals as dead. This ascent gave us infinite trouble; it tore our hands, our tempers, and our trousers, and when we reached the top and saw a vista of cliffs in front of us, we felt considerably daunted. But we had to go on. When the pony-men sat down and wept—and really I did not blame them though I chid them severely—they were asked what they intended doing. There was only one answer, to go on. So on we went, down and down, and then to our disgust up again over a great grass mountain with round sides like a balloon, and the loads fell off and we just left them. We camped at last in a sheltered spot, pretty well worn out by the length and fatigue of the day, and as we stopped the heavens opened, and a deluge of rain and hail came down. We managed to get up the

tents and abundant wood consoled us. It poured all night, and in the morning I saw a woolly mass lying by my bed and a small face calmly looking at me. It was Li Darin, the tame sheep, who had found a summer night in his own country not at all to his taste. We had to push on, as the food question was now all important, and my experience is that in the Tien Shan the supply problem is as great as the weather. Or rather they go hand in hand, as the supplies do not last the intended journey owing to the weather which alters, if it does not ruin, all plans. We were now in the last valley of the Tekes area, and the Pass in front of us would take us over the main axis of the Tien Shan. We ascended the lovely, wooded glen, knowing well we should not find its fellow on the other side, and crossed out of it by the Kangal Qara Dawan. This Pass consisted of shifting shale on a steep gradient, and we had to walk in front of the animals making a track for them as well as we could. From the top of the Pass we looked south over the barren serrated ridges that differentiate the southern Tien Shan from the northern, and camped that night on a wide, grassy plain with no fuel.

The scenery we now met with was impressive in an austere and forbidding fashion. There were occasional small glaciers and a little snow on the jutting peaks, but usually we contemplated an immense panorama of bare, arid mountains, with cliffs for sides and precipitous, narrow gorges. There was little hope of any grass or tree gaining hold on those inhospitable crags, and the absence of any trees or

shrubs as we looked over such a welter of ridges was truly remarkable. We met some shepherds but we could buy nothing from them, so we pushed on south crossing a Pass a day. It was hard work for us all owing chiefly to the lack of fuel. In one shepherd's hut we found a fiddle and three logs, of which we took two. It was only when we reached the Kizil Su that trees appeared, and we went down a beautiful well-wooded valley with a fine stream. Turki shepherds became numerous, but they lived so primitively as to afford us very little help. They spent their time crouched under a ledge of rock, and the discomfort of their existence contrasted with the ease of Kasaks in like circumstances. The pastures were eaten down as we descended, but we arrived at last at Mis Bulak, just where plain and mountain joined, on a lovely autumn evening in August, and were once more in the populated lands of the south, with Kucha and Bai four short marches away.

CHAPTER XXVIII

RETURN TO KASHGAR

We had been to Mis Bulak in 1927, but the sheikh of the place and his wife were too old to remember us. We now spent a couple of days there comfortably enough, though there was a shortage of food as the crops were not yet ready. The men were away tending the cattle, but their place was well filled by three viragos, the daughters-in-law of the old couple. These ladies played on a primitive musical instrument made from a very thin piece of wood with a tongue cut out of it. At one end is a string which the performer jerks as she blows on the wooden tongue, and the result is a weak series of squeaking notes resembling the melody produced with a comb and a piece of paper. The local name for this instrument was the kuzuk. I saw it in one or two places subsequently, but none of our party had seen it previously.

The charm of Mis Bulak was the abundant spring of cold, sparkling and delicious water, pure and clear, the best we had had in Turkestan. The place had little else to offer; the lean period when the old harvest is finished and the new one not gathered is always an awkward time in small hamlets. Our conversation now became of a very material kind, and our enquiries all bore on food. Melons were reported

ready at Bai, the apricots were over, the peaches were not yet ripe. Flour was reported to be rather dear, rice more so, and forage for horses more so still, thanks to the late harvest. All this information was practically correct as we subsequently discovered on arriving at Bai.

Our way now led over very different country from that which we had been travelling over before. On our right was the main range of the Tien Shan, but to the left we looked down on that strange medley of arid hills that at once attracts and repels. There were low eroded ridges of red and white sandstone, and higher hills with sparse dry vegetation, and the August sun made the panorama before us seem red-hot. The mirage quivered and swirled over these rolling layers of spurs and hillocks, and the desolation was overwhelming. There was not a living thing to be seen, still less any water. Tucked away in some chance ravine, there might be a little pool with a few trees, but that was out of sight and so unknown, and the nearest water was many miles away beyond the stark aridity before us. We eventually reached the main road, and so to Bai, where we stayed in considerable comfort in the headman's house, pitching our tents beneath a wide trellis of vines. The grapes, alas, were not ripe. We were rather delayed at Bai as the ponies needed shoeing, and all the smiths were busy making implements for the harvest. After a little negotiation the shoes were produced; their price was much above that at Kashgar.

Yet once more we took the main road to Aqsu. It is a dull road at all times, but certainly it was diversi-



A Mappa in front of the Chinese Temple, Kashgar

fied by the harvest. The corn was being threshed and winnowed, and the pole of the threshing-floor was always ornamented with a tuft of corn like a small sheaf. This was the momun, supposed, we were told, to indicate which way the wind blew, but more probably put up as a charm or an offering. The road was hot and dusty, and we felt sorry for a mob of soldiers who were on their way north. It was not surprising that the melon-fields suffered. Qara Yulghun we remembered well, for it is one of the places famous for melons, which seem to develop a particularly good flavour in the slightly salt soil. We tried them, and acknowledged that Qara Yulghun deserved its reputation. Owing to some recent rain in the hills near Aqsu, the salt deposits in the soil had been brought to the surface, and considerable stretches of country looked as though snow were lying on them—a curious illusion in the great heat.

Aqsu was hot and dull, as the genial Taotai was absent in the north, and there was no one to do the honours. So I did not see his delightful garden, with its pleasing mixture of fruit, vegetables and flowers, but I was again surprised at the abundance of the supplies at Aqsu. Every time I entered Turkestan Proper from the north during the autumn months, I was greatly struck by the overflowing stocks in the bazaar. And once again I marvelled at the lavishness of nature. The famous 'beshak shirin' or 'undoubtedly sweet' melons were now ripe, and we found them much to our taste, though not abundant and a little difficult to procure, as the Turkis were as fond of them as we were.

At Aqsu we heard of the death at Kashgar of Tihwa Ram, and we all mourned him, for a better, braver dog never lived. We were not fortunate in our dogs, as Cherchen also fell ill and died; although not to be compared with Tihwa, he was a very likeable animal and an excellent watch-dog for the camp. So Niya was the only survivor, and he was an unworthy one, as he turned out a thief like Terek and could not be trusted for a moment.

We travelled again by Uch Turfan but were distressed to find that our host, Abdul Qadir, had let his delightful garden and orchard go to waste. The trees were bearing, it was true, but there was an air of general neglect. The irrigation would next be omitted and that meant the end. I could not discover the cause, for Abdul Qadir, when I first knew him, only five years before, was a man of energy and originality. Perhaps he had just gone to seed, overcome by family cares, official worries and the eternal indebtedness of the Sart.

We travelled through the low hills and found it warm. Li Darin especially objected, and had to be carried on a horse. As we approached Kashgar I thought that the country looked its best. It was the season when dust-storms were rare, the grey loess soil was covered with crops, country produce was abundant, and the land wore a mellow, luxuriant aspect. The small tanks, fringed with poplars and willows, with the orchards close by and their trellises of vines heavy with grapes, were cool and seductive. Small blame, then, to the Turki if he never leaves his home to see the world, unless stern necessity drives

him. He likes flowers, and we saw asters, balsam, marigolds, phlox, and other kinds in the gardens. But nothing was sweeter than the delicately scented grass (sokel or zokel, a polypogon) that perfumed the wastes at the foot of the hills as we entered the cultivated land.

On September 18th, 1931, we reached Kashgar.

GLOSSARY

AMBAN.	A Chinese official.
AOUL.	The circular felt tents of the nomads. Sometimes called a Yurt, Aqoi, Kibitka, or Khirgo.
ARABA.	A country cart.
BAI.	A well-to-do person. Often used as a term of address.
BEG.	A headman.
BURAN.	A storm, especially a sand-storm.
CHANTO.	A Turki.
CHIQQAN.	An aromatic plant.
DASHT.	Desert. Wilderness.
DAWAN.	A mountain pass.
GOBI.	Desert. Wilderness.
HAJI.	A pilgrim to Mecca.
HUNZA.	A hill state in N.W. of India.
KABOB.	A piece of meat cooked on a skewer.
KALMUCK.	A Mongol, usually nomadic; often used as a term of abuse.
KASAK.	A Mohammedan nomad.
KHANATE.	A principality.
KIRGHIZ.	A Mohammedan nomad, chiefly found in Chinese territory in the Pamirs.
LANGAR.	A rest-house, inn.
MANTO.	A meat dumpling.
MAZAR.	A Mohammedan shrine.
NAGAR.	A hill state in North-West of India.
NALA.	A small valley or ravine.
NUMDAH.	A felt rug.
QUSH.	The golden eagle.

SAI.	(1) Desert. Wilderness. Barren ground. (2) A valley.
SART.	A Turki.
SERAI.	A traveller's halting-place : an inn.
TAOTAI.	The governor of a district, an imperial term. Still used in Chinese Turkestan.
TARANCHI.	A Mohammedan settler in the Ili valley.
TOGHRAK.	The wild poplar (pop. balsamifera).
TUNGAN.	A Chinese Mohammedan.
TURKI.	A Mohammedan native of Chinese Turkestan.
YAILAQ.	A summer grazing ground.
YAMEN.	A Chinese official residence or office.
YAYEH.	A follower or servant attached to a yamen.
WANG.	A chief.

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SINKIANG
(CHINESE TURKESTAN AND PART OF OUTER MONGOLIA)
Scale of Miles
100
50
0
100
200
OUTER MONGOLIA
GREAT ALTAI MTS
RUSSIA IN ASIA
Zaisan Nor
Irtish R.
Sharasume
Chimunia
Kara Adyr Mts.
Ulun Nor
Saur Mts.
Chuguchak
Khobuk R.
Arik Nor
Emil Plain
Barlik Mts.
Telli Nor
Borotala
Maili Mts.
Zungarian Gates
Ebi Nor
Sairam Nor
Zungaria Desert
Manas R.
Manas
Fukang
Guchen
Bar Kul
Barkul
TUGA PASS
Chikuching
Barkul Mts.
Qarlik Tagh
Liaotun
URUMCHI
Jimasa
Bogdo San Lake
PEAK 14,500
BOGDOULA
TENGRI DAWAN
Suiting
Kulja (Ili)
Nicki
Ili R.
Islamyuz
Mazar
Kash R.
MANAS PEAKS
Araltepe
Kunges R.
Qoilikutun
Togucha
Astina
Hami
(Kumul)
Davanchin
Turfan
Pichan
Lukchun
Toksun
Subashi
Bejantura
Aidin Kol
Arghai Bulak
Achik Bulak
Kumush
Tekes R.
MARAT PASS
BURUL PASS
Urga
KOTYL PASS
Vierna
(Almata)
Kalmuckkure
Shotta
TILAHMAD PASS
Karakizil
Ushaktal
Arpishmo Bulak
Gobi Desert
Issik Kul
Prjevalsk
Khan Tengri
23,600
KANGAL KARA DAWAN
Karakul Lake
Tawilgha
Kara Shahr
Baghrash Kul
MUSART PASS
Kokyar
Tarlak
Ishma
Yangi Hissar
Tim Mingol
Singer
Korla
KURUK TAGH
Bugur
Yaka Arik
Kucha
Shindi
Altmish Bulak
Karakum
Chong Kol
Yingpan
Yangi or Kum Darya
Kokshal Mts.
Abad
Doshombe Bazar
Shaikhe
Jam
Shahyar
Tikenlik
Loulan Site
Uch Turfan
Aqsu
(Yangi Shahr)
Doral
Safar Bai
Tarim R.
Taushkan R.
Sairam Mazar
Chol Kuduk
Yangi Su
BILOTI PASS
Kril Eshme
Abad
Kelpin
Chilan
Tarim (Yarkand) Darya
Tokun
Lop Nor
Keklik
Yai Dobe
Takla Makan Desert
Lop
Abdal
Sargan
Tongustik Shor Kul
Tumshuk
Miran
Altin Artush
Kashgar R.
Maralbashi
Kizil R.
KASHGAR
Faizabad
Besh Karim
Yarkand
SINKIANG
Charkhlik
Yangi Shahr
Tashmalik
Yopchand
Abad
Merket
Vash Shahri
Charchan R.
Gez Karaul
Yangi Hissar
Tatran
Qungur
Bulunkul
Iggizyar
Kizil
Kokrobat
YARKAND
CHARCHAN
Mustagh Ata
Posgam
Koshlash
Chinglik
Khotan Darya
Kara Kash
Keriya R.
Imam Jafar Sadik
Yartungaz R.
Endere R.
Karghalik
Tashkurghan
Guma
Moji
KHOTAN
Kokyar
Koshtagh
Sanju
Zawa
KARA KASH
Dufdar
KILIK PASS
MINTAKA PASS
Ak Masjid
KUEN LUN MTS
Lop
Chira
Keriya
Niya
Yesyulghun
Afghan-Wakhan
YANGI PASS
Nura
Imamlar
Hunza
Nagel
Kirghiz Jangal
Khufalang
Pisha
Gilgit
KASHMIR (Baltistan)

